

Crowd funding: between politics and antipolitics

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For my grandma, who has taught me so much.

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Abstract

Crowd funding platforms make projects financially viable through contributions from people in a way that apparently dismisses support from government or corporations. This realm is not precisely public but allows this community to sustain strong political claims. The tension in the divide between the public and the private is the core of this investigation: the emphasis put on action within the crowd funding community reinforces a world view that puts forward the anew in the form of a very specific realm which blurs the public and the private boundaries.

The relationship between these realms has been long debated in political and social theory. Arendt criticized the role of the modern state as a guardian of individual freedom, highlighting that the capacity for effective political action is often still restricted to elites. Private interests of corporations have compromised the political sphere, as Wolin and Schedler have argued, and states take decisions within the private realm, diminishing public interests. Finally, Bellah has argued this scenario emphasizes private interests, favoring individualism. Yet, he adds, the lack of social ties makes citizens eager for connections. This thesis combines these critiques together with a hacker culture that focuses on action, as described by Palmås.

I draws on interviews I conducted with people engaged with crowd funding. The analysis suggests that if the institutional conjuncture seems to seize the public sphere from people, citizens might be fighting back by recreating the public realm within the

purportedly private space on online crowd funding. In the process they rely on cathartic self-perceptions and dissonances regarding their position within society and their representativeness, a fact that calls into question the potential of crowd funding as political action. This research contributes to the understanding of digital culture by reaching online networks impact upon areas such as politics, professional careers, and money.

Keywords: crowd funding, politics, antipolitics, public space, private space.

1. Introduction

*We are a lot of people, doing a lot.
We are people that got together to transform and occupy public spaces,
To propose new education models,
And to rethink the laws of the country.
We care for the environment,
We have measured the magnetic field of the Earth,
And reconnected science and society.
Together we search for the truth of the facts and forgotten truths.
We render the invisible ones visible.
We fight for women empowerment and for a freer sexuality.
We promote change and bring back traditional cultures.
We are tireless innovators,
Who intensely celebrate Carnival,
And overcome any barrier to create.
Collectively we have already organized meetings, theatre plays, songs,
books, games, hundreds of movies, and comic books — a lot of comic
books.
We are tracing a path of more independence, proximity, honesty and
transparency to turn ideas into action.
And this is only the beginning.
In 4 years more than 1500 projects were brought to life,
Millions of Reais were donated by 200 thousand people to carry out
these initiatives.¹
And then I ask you: what if we were 1 million?
(Catarse 2015c)²*

Catarse is the biggest Brazilian crowd funding platform and these verses were recited in a commemorative video that was posted on YouTube once the platform reached 200,000 users. A crowd funding platform, simply put, is a website in which users can do two things: on the one hand, some users, creators, can propose projects together with an ideal target for funding; on the other hand, other users, supporters, can donate money

to contribute to the success of these projects. When celebrating the 200,000 users' landmark, Catarse affirmed that roughly 10 million dollars had already changed hands from supporters to projects creators through their platform.

The numbers might not be too impressive when compared to the big international players — for instance, the same year that Catarse celebrated the 200,000th user Kickstarter, the biggest crowd funding platform in existence, had already managed to gather 3.5 billion dollars for projects (Kickstarter 2015).³ In spite of this difference in terms of the magnitude of the enterprise, the tone used to celebrate this sort of achievement is very similar among a multitude of crowd funding platforms — Kickstarter included. And from a sociological perspective, these verses (referenced above) are very rich.

Within the personal and welcoming tone granted by the first-person in the plural, together with the enthusiasm of the narrator, there are intriguing hints about social values, political positions and world views. There is a clear trace of civic engagement in the appreciation of public spaces, of law-making and of new educational approaches. There are ideas usually linked to left-wing politics, such as environmentalism and feminism. In addition, there are very specific and practical approaches to life, as in the hands-on culture of makers and in communities that praise a variety of forms of art. Nevertheless, these crowd funding platforms are still organized as for-profit organizations and many project creators are looking for profit, thus no one can assume all projects have a charitable basis. There is an arguably unexpected combination of elements typically related to the public and also to the private spheres.

Even when projects — and sometimes whole platforms — are targeting charity, there are political elements in this mixture of those spheres, as in the case of medical care:

YouCaring has helped its users raise more than \$900m since 2011 and its momentum is building, with roughly \$400m coming in over the past year. The company says close to half of its 350,000 active campaigns are related to healthcare and the fastest-growing category is fundraisers for cancer (Financial Times, 2018, quotes in US dollars).

Platforms such as YouCaring and GoFundMe are dedicated to all sorts of charity crowd funding, and still the category of projects that boost their figures is that of medical campaigns. On the one hand, money changes hands only in the private sphere, from private donors to private individuals in need. On the other hand, it would be extremely naïve to discard the role of national policies in this case: the lack of a public healthcare system in the US probably has something to do with this rapid growth, and also the growth *per se* might be read as a political statement about the government's failure to provide health support to its citizens — after all, 60% of Americans believe it is the government's responsibility to offer universal healthcare as a basic human right (Pew Research 2017). In fact, GoFundMe's initial idea was to help people asking for donations for their holidays and weddings; nowadays the platform calls itself "the world's no.1 site for medical, illness & healing fundraising" (Financial Times, 2018).

To add yet another layer to the politics intertwined within crowd funding — even in its charity branch — the GoFundMe CEO clearly stated that they fight the "monopoly of traditional charities." In his words:

This notion of democratising campaigning is when the light bulb went off in my mind. I said, "Wait a minute. This is the disruption. This is the transformation" (Financial Times 2018).

The Financial Times article is written by Barney Jopson, US *policy* correspondent — emphasis added.

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In June 2013 Brazil was going through a very intense political moment. In the middle of a "lavish spending on World Cup soccer stadiums" (New York Times 2013) all over the country, the mayor of São Paulo announced a 0.20 Brazilian Reais (less than 0.10 US dollars) raise in public-transit fare. In response, a social movement called *The Free Fare Movement* went to the streets in protest but the initiative was severely punished with police brutality. These apparently local issues triggered a national reaction: in the next days, protests took place all over the country, mobilizing millions of Brazilians. These events have not passed unnoticed by international media. At their apex, for instance, they were at the front page and at within an editorial of the June 21st edition of *The New York Times*. One week later, by June 28th, the protests were featured on another front page in the same newspaper.⁴

One of the catchphrases heard everywhere was: "it's not just about the 20 cents." In other words, people were not pulled onto the streets by the public-transit fare cause, neither by the excessive use of police force alone: these were merely the trigger to demonstrations based on the rather unpopular priorities of government expenditure at

the time, that is to say, a lot of public money allocated to hosting a World Cup, while basic rights such as education and healthcare were left unattended and in a precarious situation (New York Times 2013). In sum, there was a lot of unvoiced public dissatisfaction and the events in São Paulo were not relevant *per se*, but the subsequent outrage was used to finally express this political climate:

Across the nation, protesters keep taking to the streets by the thousands, venting their anger at a broad range of politicians and problems, including high taxes and deplorable public services. But a special ire has been reserved for Congress and its penchant for sheltering dozens of generously paid legislators who have been charged — and sometimes even convicted — of crimes like money laundering, bribery, drug trafficking, kidnapping and murder (Romero 2013).

The popular uprising was supported by massive participation in the street, accompanied by trending social media. National and international news outlets covered the numerous demonstrations. The political pressure at place was emerging from a plural, non-partisan, and spontaneous movement. The hope to democratically build a strong republic was getting a boost in Brazil.

In spite of that, Daniel, a young Brazilian entrepreneur, decided not to take part in any of these protests. He has founded different projects in the last couple of years. One of them is called *Nós.vc*, a crowd funding platform focused on education, gathering resources to making meaningful meetings happen, allowing a multitude of users to learn and share any kinds of skills. Another project he has founded is called *Estaleiro Liberdade*, a learning space focused on self-knowledge and entrepreneurship, "but in a pirate

way" — as he would put it himself. He is extremely dissatisfied with the education system, the government as an institution, and the traditional idea of a professional career. None of these institutions, according to Daniel, has offered him the kind of freedom and lifestyle he is looking for. He is not earning an income as the founder of *Nós.vc*, and *Estaleiro Liberdade* largely operates in a pay-as-you-want scheme (they are transparent about the costs, and participants decide how much to contribute to keep the space running). Still, he makes a living out of these two projects: there is a tiny profit margin in *Estaleiro Liberdade* and he is constantly sharing the skills he knows the best through his own platform, *Nós.vc*. He also has a couple of successful projects funded through Catarse.

Daniel's choices are clearly politically and socially motivated: he does not seem to be a typical private individual merely focused on making ends meet. Arguably, he is looking for new ways to relate to others — this attempt at new forms of relationship might be social *per se*, but beyond that, it is also politically motivated (since he claims the government and the market does not facilitate his lifestyle). However, despite his reservations about the government, he did not feel compelled to join the biggest anti-government public demonstrations in Brazil's recent history. Instead he stayed at home.

Both *Estaleiro Liberdade* and *Nós.vc* were founded in close relationship with *Engage*, a software house whose slogan was *Power to the people*. In fact, Daniel's ambitions were pretty much aligned with this idea: to offer ordinary people ways to autonomously trace their own paths, usually leading to a lifestyle that involves making a living from their own passions and projects — an objective strongly based on the idea of individual free-

dom and autonomy. Among *Engage's* main projects there were many open-source platforms and different innovative and engaging projects focused on civic actions in Brazil and Latin America, ideas they understand to have a positive social impact. *Catarse* is actually a spin-off of *Engage*.

Arguably, Daniel and *Engage* are dedicating much of their time to creating something different, not only for them, but for their community. Academically speaking, they have imprecise but optimistic ideas about common goods, about community and society, and they are engaged in making something different within these realms. And still the popular, non-partisan, non-violent protests calling into question the very core of Brazilian national politics were not interesting for Daniel — who has opted to follow the demonstrations from his friends' online and offline testimonies.

Labeling Daniel as apolitical may be incoherent with the ideas he puts forward through his projects. However, politics as protesting, as political parties, and even as voting has completely lost its appeal for him. He would say he does not care about politics, that he only minds his own business — but interestingly, for him that would mean making his projects as open and inclusive as possible, almost a public or common good. He does not consider himself or his projects as charity or philanthropy. On the contrary, in a candid and frank way, he is open and unapologetic about the fact that his projects are geared towards making profit. Nevertheless he left a promising career as an art director in a mainstream advertisement agency to run these projects — a career that would probably offer him a bigger paycheck at the end of the day. His new idea of success has changed, and

his idea of success now includes the individual freedom and autonomy that the corporate world could not offer him. Besides that, helping others to change their own lifestyles is part of his new idea of success.

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Daniel's story is typical of the crowd funding community: people who are engaged in these projects and used to these platforms are not ignoring the social and political aspects of the society in which they live. They have a specific social and political awareness that pushes them into activities to fund specific lifestyles, and at the same time, that pushes them away from traditional politics and fund raising (such as government programs, NGOs, charity or private corporate sponsoring). As Felipe, an interviewee I will introduce later on,⁵ has described to me, crowd funding allows people to act on the margins of these institutions, calling social values into question while risking something slightly new. At the surface this movement suggests an interesting tension: people might be trying to forge a space *outside* politics to, namely, *be* political. Yet this space they are creating is not traditionally a public sphere as one might expect from political arenas — on the contrary, the economic side of this space is skewed towards profiting from people's private ventures.

This particular clash of interests, when people try to be political outside of politics, is the main focus of this research, in particular, the notion that in doing so, they end up blurring the boundaries of what we know as the public and private spheres. This is not

a critique of this blurring, but a sociological analysis of what is achieved and what is left behind when embracing these strategies. Also, this inquiry is about the peculiar relation among the crowd funding community and the incumbent institutions they are avoiding: government and political parties, but at times also corporations and the financial markets. This avoidance is put forward without a confrontation: crowd funding is more focused on pragmatic goals, such as funding and bootstrapping projects, than it is in an active critique of these institutions. The hands-on culture mentioned above seems to drive this community to put forward proposals -- that is to say, this research is about how people afford to have a voice not against the government, the state and maybe even the market -- but in spite of them. In sum, the focus within this thesis is on the political and social aspects that emerge when incumbent institutions are called into question in the public and in the private spheres -- and the role of crowd funding within this development.

Also, the endeavor of forging political action within crowd funding brings in another debate, namely, what is the nature of the relationships enabled by the emergence of the internet and what are the consequences from a political point of view. The crowd fund community seems to strongly rely on the idea of online and offline networks: peers connecting to peers to donate and receive money, to spread the word about crowd funding campaigns and to make projects turn into reality. This idea is aligned with Benkler's argument of the wealth of networks (2006), for example, highlighting how the internet can be disruptive in terms of fighting concentration of power and in terms of generating and distributing wealth. However, considering that crowd funding platforms themselves are

private enterprises, usually for-profit companies, new questions emerge. Critiques of platform capitalism (such as Tufekci 2014 and 2016, for example) have been discussing the problems created when large amount of the public sphere is transposed to private entities: for example, what are the consequences to be acknowledged when most of the communication sustaining any political movement nowadays goes through for-profit platforms, such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter. For instance, these websites depends on algorithms that are not open to the general public and, therefore, it is unknown whether (intentionally or not) they favor the emergence of certain movements in favor of others.

Discussing the possibility of crowd funding as political action, hence, cannot ignore the fact that it takes place on online, private platforms, reinforcing the tension between the public and private realms in this research topic: even if what my informants report is aligned with the ideals of a public realm, it is actually taking place in a private space — or, in other words, the point here is to stress that members of the crowd funding community rely on private corporations (the crowd funding platforms) in order to act on the public realm, in order to be political. These debates are crucial both from a methodological and from a theoretical standpoint — as the scholars of platform capitalism have been discussing broadly in the last few years.

As stated in the previous paragraphs, one of the main sources of data for this work is in-depth qualitative interviews. The next chapter reflects on the methodological aspects of this choice and how they have contributed to and shaped this research. Following on from that, I examine the theoretical background to this research in chapter 3.

In terms of theory, Arendt's (1968, 1973, 1985, 1998 and 2005) work is given a prominent role due to her reflections on the premises of the private and public sphere and also as an aid to understanding tensions between citizens and governments in modern democracies. Her theory allows us to consider these topics and question the barriers of funding the anew in contemporary societies (as Arendt herself would put it), that is to say, to question structural and institutional settings that — intentionally or not — end up making it difficult for ordinary people to act and have impact on our society. This theoretical framework helps in the understanding of tensions and critiques put forward by the crowd funding community, especially when it comes to governments and corporations. Together with Arendt, the literature review also draws on scholars and theories close to the idea of antipolitics (such as Mouffe 2005 and Schedler 1997), as well as other critiques of modern states (such as Wolin 1983 and 2004, and Bellah 2008). Their work enables consideration of crowd funding claims not only in terms of the possibility or impossibility of innovating, but also to better position it in a more complex and nuanced spectrum for political action. This literature review chapter discusses, then, the limits and potentialities of crowd funding as a form of politics. Finally, in order to ponder the role of technology in this scenario, the chapter also refers to the STS (science, technology and society) literature in order to properly frame the debate on politics and digital culture, mainly bringing in studies related to open source and open knowledge societies, drawing on Pálmas's (2006) work.

The fourth chapter, *Re-signifying money* draws on my interviews with partici-

pants to explore different aspects of the crowd funding community. Their relationship to money is put on the spotlight for several reasons: to begin, the mechanism at the core of these platforms allows them to (at least partially) opt out of traditional ways of making a living (and also of traditional ways to donate money). However, this is only the surface. Underneath this behavior lies a series of social and political statements re-signifying more traditional views on several aspects of modern life such as jobs, career, social security and life goals. This very specific world view that results from these re-significations is a rich resource not only to understand their relation to money, but to understand how they see their surroundings and how they face their overarching aspirations in life.

The fifth chapter, *Autonomy*, further probes the aspirations of the crowd funding community. From their relation to the world (set in the previous chapter) the objective is a thick description concerning the critiques they put forward by re-signifying money. In a certain way, this chapter describes precisely which institutions are being called into question, and by which means. Once more the hands-on characteristic plays a prominent role: this action of calling into question is handled in a very pragmatic attempt to set an environment for action outside the institutions they disavow — and not confronting or clearly criticizing these institutions. In other words, this chapter is about how the crowd funding community tries to hack the market and the government, and how the trust in the social network (not merely the online ones) is a crucial one for them to achieve what they call autonomy.

Next, in chapter 6, *A new realm to empower action*, the tensions between crowd

funding and incumbent institutions is further analyzed: the descriptive tone fades out to make room for a more analytical reflection on how political theory might reinforce the potential for politics within crowd funding. The idea is to understand the emphasis they put on action, and how their take on it can relate to Arendt's concept of action (1998). In some sense, even if arguably emerging in the private realm, there are important political aspects in the supposedly public realm forged by crowd funding communities. The reflection is not precisely *if* crowd funding is political — I assume it is — but the theoretical take on *how* they afford this political voice.

Finally, in chapter 7, *Isolation, silence and absence*, I investigate the potential of putting forward an alternative to mainstream political and economic institutions — or, more precisely, if the present status of crowd funding might be a contender in this scenario. This analysis emphasizes antipolitical aspects of the realm created by the crowd funding communities and also debates the strategic ways they handle cognitive aspects of this institutional tension. In sum, my informants' cathartic optimism about the political aspects of crowd funding depends upon a series of dissonances in order to defend the neutrality and autonomous aspects of the realm they are putting forward — that is to say, there are more complex social relationships that they, deliberately or not, tend to veil in order to stand as a new and inherently genuine alternative to incumbent institutions.

2. Methodology

Crowd funding is a phenomenon that has been engaging millions of people, online and offline. Kickstarter, one of the biggest platforms among them, raised its supporter base (backers, as they call users that contribute to campaigns) from almost 9 million to more than 14 million in the last 3 years - a crowd big enough to back almost 140 thousand projects with a total sum surpassing 3.5 billion US dollars (Kickstarter 2015, Kickstarter 2018). Indiegogo, another platform, had 2.5 million active users in 2015 alone (Indiegogo 2018). The numbers and the pace they have grown in the last few years are described below (also from Kickstarter 2015, Kickstarter 2018):

Table 1. Kickstarter figures from 2015 to early 2018

Total	Jan./2015	Jan./2018	%
USD pledged	1.75B	3.47B	98%
Backers	8.8M	14.1M	60%
Projects funded	86K	137K	59%

In addition to these statistics, this community appears to be proud of the quality of its achievements. In its 2016 balance Kickstarter highlights the achievements of some projects funded through the platforms: during that year the London Design Museum added 6 Kickstarter funded pieces to its permanent collection; 19 Kickstarter funded films made their way to Tribeca Film Festival; 4 Kickstarter funded projects received a Grammy

nominations and another three were listed by Times magazine in their inventions of the year list.

In the face of such a meaningful increase, the primary research question of this thesis is an invitation for an in-depth reflection about the social implications of this expansion. The assumption is that there is a multitude of projects out there to be funded and a very specific mechanism to decide which one of them will be funded. The decisions derived from this mechanism are primarily based on monetary contributions. However, in the background lies a complex network of social ties that can foster or deter contributions: the range of users' social networks, the ability or appeal to attract spontaneous media, the alignment to popular or niche causes and so on. Therefore, underneath this funding scheme, crowd funding also operates as a platform for political agency: there are conflicting projects and interests and there is also a public deciding what really happens with each of these possibilities. Crowd funding is clearly a form of political engagement, but the nature, scope and the implication of its legitimacy and power as a political tool is still uncertain for both adherents and external observers. My aim is to explore the social relations and world views created by crowd funding, especially in comparison to traditional approaches to conventional politics (organized parties and social movements, institutionalized procedures such as voting) and to entrepreneurship (activities primarily focused on establishing highly profitable businesses).

Initially what needs to be covered is the specific nature of crowd funding initiatives. Since projects are proposed and backed by ordinary people, a naive approach would

see it merely as a way to bring ordinary ideas to life. Alternatively, a more cynical point of view would claim that it is all about business, since most crowd funding platforms emerged as startups (and, indeed, a couple of them actually became millionaire companies). Yet a more utopian and libertarian standpoint could claim it is all about a very specific political discourse; possibly they would argue that crowd funding confronts corporations and government — traditional institutions that usually act as sources for funding (and in some circumstances these incumbent institutions can be a unique source of funding). Perhaps these are only a few stereotypes, but the objective is to understand how different ideals and purposes are balanced within crowd funding projects and communities.

The areas briefly described above guide this research. They refer to three research questions that could be summarized as: What are the specificities, biases and limitations of crowd funding politics? How does crowd funding relate to incumbent political and economic institutions? What is the nature and the social implications of the political worldview put forward by members of the crowd funding communities? This chapter draws upon a methodological framework in order to address these questions. It begins by discussing the data collection strategy, its justifications and limitations.

2.1. Data collection and analysis

The data collection included 26 interviews with platform founders and staff,

project creators, supporters and experts. These informants are from the 7 different countries including 5 continents. This mix allowed me to investigate experiences from more than 10 different crowd funding platforms from 4 different countries. In fact, many of the interviewees have experience in more than one platform, but for the sake of simplicity, in the following table I listed only the one that was prominent in each interview. Finally, a few of them asked me to mention them by pseudonyms; in order to protect their identity I am not explicitly distinguishing them from the ones who have not asked for pseudonyms. Also, I am not using (real or fake) family names for any of my informants:

Table 2. Interviewee profiles

Name	Profile	Platform	Gender	Nationality	Residence
Adam	Supporter	Ulule (France)	♂	Brazil	France
Amanda	Creator	Catarse (Brazil)	♀	Brazil	Brazil
Anna	Founder	Cinese (Brazil)	♀	Brazil	Brazil
Brittany	Creator	GoFundMe (USA)	♀	USA	Brazil
Carla	Supporter	Kickstarter (USA)	♀	Brazil	Brazil
Chris	Expert		♂	UK	UK
Daniel	Founder	Unlock (Brazil)	♂	Brazil	Brazil
Daniel	Supporter	Benfeitoria (Brazil)	♂	Brazil	Brazil
Daniel	Supporter	Kickstarter (USA)	♂	Germany	Germany
Emily	Founder	PeopleFundIt (UK)	♀	UK	UK

Name	Profile	Platform	Gender	Nationality	Residence
Felipe	Expert		♂	Brazil	Italy
Felipe	Creator	Benfeitoria (Brazil)	♂	Brazil	UK
Giovana	Staff	Cinese (Brazil)	♀	Brazil	Brazil
Juliana	Supporter	Catarse (Brazil)	♀	Brazil	Brazil
Lisandro	Supporter	Kickstarter (USA)	♂	Brazil	Brazil
Maria	Creator	Indiegogo (USA)	♀	Romania	UK
Miguel	Founder	Catarse (Brazil)	♂	Brazil	Brazil
Noah	Supporter	Indiegogo (USA)	♂	USA	USA
Pedro	Creator	Catarse (Brazil)	♂	Brazil	Brazil
Rodrigo	Staff	Neighborly (USA)	♂	UK	USA
Sam	Expert		♂	USA	Spain
Stephen	Expert		♂	UK	UK
Talita	Supporter	Kickstarter (USA)	♀	Brazil	Brazil
Victor	Creator	Patreon (USA)	♂	Brazil	Brazil
Wei	Supporter	Kickstarter (USA)	♂	China	China
William	Founder	ProduceRun (USA)	♂	Australia	USA

The sampling and data collection phase began with the publicly available channels to contact individuals at crowd funding platforms: email, contact form, social media

etc. I reached them, explained the purpose of the research and asked for their participation. If they opted to cooperate, then I would invite them to an interview and also would employ the method of snowball sampling (that is to say, I would ask them to suggest other people I could also reach). Usually I would try to snowball different profiles: for example, when talking to staff I would ask if they could think of a particular supporter or project creator that might accept my invitation for an interview. In spite a couple of positive responses, this strategy was not that successful: I received no replies to many emails and posts; when I did obtain a response, usually it was a typical customer support text with standardized responses. It was invariably the case that the message within these responses was that anything I would like to know about their platform was already available on their institutional web pages. The few real conversations I managed to obtain using this approach ended up in declined interviews -- and in the case of the biggest platforms, I usually read that their company discourages (or forbids) them to take part in interviews.

At this point I was required to work on a different strategy for data collection and I reverted to my personal background: I have been writing computer codes since I was a child. During my early twenties this hobby became my main professional activity for a brief period. From this experience I was already in touch with the free and open-source software community and also with groups of web developers, especially within communities guided by hacktivism (which ended up as the topic of my Master's thesis in sociology). There are a great amount of people from these civic-minded tech communities that have become involved in crowd funding, thus I consulted with previous colleagues in order to

facilitate my access to informants. I could easily reach the ones I already knew and ask them for ideas, asking them who I should contact and requesting introductions. Snowballing succeeded from thereon, allowing me to collect valuable data for this research.

This access to data requires some notes in terms of positionality. Even with friendly introductions from colleagues from think tanks or working in the Silicon Valley I still had no access to some platforms I would like to have heard from — this was the case, for example, of Indiegogo and Kickstarter. As mentioned earlier, the larger firms and platforms I approached declined to take part. The other, smaller platforms offered me great openness to talk and to contribute, utilizing the snowballing technique. This was the case, for example, of Neighborly, PeopleFundIt, Catarse, Cinese, and Unlock. I tried to avoid using any informant from my closer social network, reverting to acquaintances, not to friends, even if I was not interviewing them directly. They were entry points to the fieldwork, not informants — in other words, in order to minimize bias I interacted with people I knew to reach people outside my regular network, expanding the sample from there.

But this does not mean the study was free of bias or limitations. Most importantly, it is appropriate to highlight that the use of qualitative methods is not intended to generalize findings but aims at a detailed and in-depth description of a specific field. In my case I was cautious to avoid extending my arguments further than my data collection allowed me to. What follows is a careful discussion based on an important share of the crowd funding community: enthusiasts that at maximum are project creators in the big players such as Kickstarter and Indiegogo, but no voice from inside these big players.

Maybe Catarse is an exception as it is the biggest crowd funding platform operating in Brazil. But that just adds another layer in terms of positionality, that of my homeland: many of my previous contacts are Brazilian, and even if they have been working in many different countries, I have greater access to data in Brazil than in any other country.

Also, I have projects crowd funded through Catarse and Nós.vc and I have also contributed to projects on Catarse, Nós.vc, Indiegogo, Kickstarter and Patreon. Contacts from these projects were not considered for this research in order to minimize bias. Finally, during the research I informally monitored some social media and forums on the internet, looking for posts related to crowd funding and some interviewees (then unknown to me) I approached after reading some post or comment that they shared publicly and which mentioned crowd funding.

One final note in terms of positionality and bias must be highlighted: as mentioned, I started the snowballing from my acquaintances and most of them were close to (or active in) hacktivist groups — and this includes me. Having this particular social circle as my initial access point means I was probably more likely to reach politically motivated participants (especially when compared to my initial plan of starting from the mainstream players such as Kickstarter or Indiegogo). On the one hand, this corroborates the impossibility of generalizing my findings — that is to say, one cannot easily extend the results of this research to describe more market-driven platforms or to describe crowd funding as a whole. On the other hand, having in mind that my research questions were centered in the possibility of understanding crowd funding as political action, this sample was more

articulated, insightful and experienced in terms of politics — that is to say, an optimum sample to test my ideas, to understand the tensions, potential and boundaries surrounding political action and crowd funding communities.

The focus of the semi-structured interviews was on the opinions of the interviewees about society, business, politics and economics — especially (but not restricted to) when it comes to crowd funding. In order to better grasp these views, the first part of the interviews did not explicitly mention crowd funding but investigated interviewees' personal trajectory and identity: I asked them to introduce themselves, to tell me about what they like to do, how they make a living and other background information that allowed me to contextualize the experiences that they were about to share with me. The idea was to adopt a funnel-shaped questioning technique, narrowing down the subject (namely, crowd funding and politics) towards the final part of the interaction. By these means, informants might get to the specific subject spontaneously -- if not, the next steps of the funnel would discreetly attempt to direct the conversation in such a direction. My role as an interviewer was to guide the interviewee in such a direction only if certain topics had not emerged in a more spontaneous way (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). At the maximum what was expected for the first part of the interviews was to have a brief idea about the interviewee's general opinion on government, corporations, civic organizations, political views and attitudes. At this point these ideas were elicited from personal stories (when someone declined a job offer from a corporation in order to work in a NGO, for example) and not mentioned explicitly. The intention was to touch upon these aspects with-

out intervention, that is to say, without stimulating the interviewee to relate these topics to crowd funding or, more broadly, to political values. This technique was employed to avoid the risk of making the interviewee stick to one or other concept just because the interviewer mentioned it — and not because it was already part of the interviewee's own point of view (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009).

The following step of the funnel is the interviewees' relationship with crowd funding; this step varied according to the informant's profile. For founders and managers, the conversation focused on how they situate their business within society, their choice to found, or work for, a crowd funding enterprise (and their motives to not work elsewhere when that was the case). For project creators, the exploration shifted towards the reasons why they opted to count on crowd funding instead of other funding possibilities. For supporters, the focus was on what had driven them to take part in crowd funding campaigns, their expectations and feeling about such experiences. Finally, with experts, I would inquire about how they ended up in their field of expertise. My experience in this block of the interviewed confirmed that the context provided by their personal background was a pretty useful interviewing technique: usually the transition to this part of the interview was seamless and spontaneous, as a sort of continuation of their life trajectory at a certain point. This was valuable in terms of the non-intervention methodology described above. Moreover, during the interview and the analysis, the personal background offered important hints to expand on informants' experiences with crowd funding.

After getting to the main subject, that is to say, after the interview had de-

finitively shifted towards crowd funding, the last block addressed interviewees' opinions and views about crowd funding in a broader sense, at this point usually (unintentionally) skewing to a political understanding of crowd funding in their lives. The investigation inquired about what interviewees expect from crowd funding, how they position it within more traditional social spheres (such as business, politics or culture), and yet verified the possibility of a more aspirational approach when it comes to the social context. If needed, I would more firmly conduct the conversation in a way that invited them to share with me their perceptions of themselves within society — that is to say, how they position themselves facing a given cultural, political and economic context. By these means, the objective was to grasp their collective and individual expectations related to crowd funding mechanisms and to society in general.

The following table summarizes this funnel shaped design, moving from a more open and spontaneous conversation to a more focused and guided one:

Table 3. Funnel-shaped interviewing technique

Stage	Objectives	Typical topics
1. Personal background (more open, more spontaneity)	Contextualize and better comprehend each interviewee	Who they are, who do they work with, what do they enjoy in their free time, educational and professional background.
2. Crowd funding experience	In-depth understating of their relationship with crowd funding	How did they get involved with crowd funding, drivers & barriers they feel, how they perceive other funding alternatives.
3. Values, objectives & aspirations (more focused,	Comprehension of the core values guiding them, projection of	Whether they consider crowd funding political or not, what

Stage	Objectives	Typical topics
more guided)	their will in terms of social, economic, cultural and political change	they are trying to achieve in life (and how crowd funding might or might not contribute), what are the main issues to be tackled in society (and how crowd funding relates to them).

The interviews were held in person or remotely (using telephone, VoIP or video conference) between May 2014 and December 2015. The context lacking in the remote interviews was not considered to represent a relevant loss of data in this particular case, since most people I talked to was very well articulated. In fact, this expressiveness relates to their engagement with crowd funding; after all they were either leaders and entrepreneurs who have founded and who manage online platforms, or creators putting their own projects online to public, or yet enthusiastic supporters who voluntarily engaged with these projects, spreading the word about them.

The content of the interviews were recorded (according to the consent of the interviewee) and transcribed. Next, the data went through a process of labeling. These labels (sometimes also referred as "codes" in methodological literature) and these meanings are a key aspect of qualitative content analysis: in practical terms, they "are immediate, are short, and define the action or experience described" (Kvale and Brinkman 2009:202). Labeled sentences and paragraphs were then grouped in similar topics, such as incumbent institutions, internet culture and lifestyle. Inside these groups, many subgroups emerged:

- *Incumbent institutions*: corporations, governments, NGOs and volunteering;

- *Internet culture*: crowd funding, hacker culture, online collaboration and social networks;
- *Lifestyle*: life trajectory, personal motivations and values, maker culture, relationship to money and career, freedom and autonomy, collaborative cultures, commons, communities and networks, politics, sharing economy and social entrepreneurship.

Each of these groups and subgroups were revisited later, that is to say, after I read the transcriptions and labeled their meaningful parts, I re-read every bit, not in the context of the interview, but group by group — or, more precisely, subgroup by subgroup. This allowed me to have a better understanding of each of these categories and their meaning to my interviewees. It is worth noting that these labels emerged both from tensions already present in my research questions (that is to say, *a priori* to data collection) and from the data collection process (that is to say, *a posteriori*, when a topic was recurrent in many interviews and I considered it relevant and created a label for it). Also, the same sentence or paragraph could hold as many labels as needed to give it the proper weight — and that allowed me to link groups and subgroups, understating the relationship between them according to my informants' point of view.

This framework made it possible to navigate through relevant topics which emerged from the data collection, linking them and understanding how they impacted upon each other; in other words, it allowed me to create inductive clusters based on the world views of the interviewees. In addition, when part of the clusters acted as a central

node connecting many different topics, this was considered a very relevant area — that was the case in the relationship to money and autonomy, which became chapters in this thesis. That way, in Kvale and Brinkman's (2009:202) terms,

the analysis has gradually moved from descriptive to more theoretical levels, leading to a 'saturation' of the material by coding process, when no new insights and interpretations seem to emerge from further codings.

Additionally, this content was triangulated with other sources, with data collected from the platforms themselves and from the interviewees' online public profiles. This process allowed a contextual interpretation of the meaning of these units of information, as well as validation of the content of the interviews. Validity and reliability emerged from the constant comparison and association between these different sources, offering consistency to the analysis (Golafshani 2003).

At the same time, the categorization provided by coding also enabled an analysis in terms of constant comparison of the parts with the context of the interview, and the parts with the context of the subgroup. This hermeneutic interpretation allowed an expansion of meaning, that is to say, in opposition to the apparent simplification of meaning by coding, this expanded the understanding of the point of view of my informants. As summarized by Kvale and Brinkman (2009:210):

Starting with an often vague and intuitive understanding of the text as a whole, its different parts are interpreted, and out of these interpretations the parts are again related to the totality, and so on. In the hermeneutical tradition this circularity is not viewed as a "vicious circle," but as a "circulus fructuosus," or spiral, which implies a possibility of a continuously deepened understanding of meaning.

This strategy was important in unveiling perspectives that were not explicitly said by my interviewees, but whose meaning and weight was possible due to analysis and interpretation. At this point, the qualitative methods employed focused on going beyond the ideas mentioned in the conversations to reach what these ideas say (or do not say) about my informants' points of view. This deconstructive reading of my data allow me to ponder "on what is not said in the text, on what is excluded by the use of the text's concepts" (Kvale and Binkman 2009:230).

This critical hermeneutical of suspicion accommodates apparently contradicting perspectives. This methodological reflection is important and had direct impact in the structure of this text. For instance, the first two analytical chapters (*Re-signifying money* and *Autonomy*) share a similar structure: first they discuss a more subtle point of view regarding the topic at hand, and next they discuss a more radical take on the same topic. This division might suggest that my informants could be split in two groups according to how intense they are when it comes to the each chapter's subject. However, this is not the case. This hermeneutical analysis corroborates that even if some informants' quotes express the idea that they might be less radical on a certain topic, the broad idea underneath their literal words was usually similar when compared to other informants with more radical quotes on that point — and *vice versa*. That is to say, this grouping was mostly a writing strategy to better communicate my findings, and not a portrait of my data collection. Accordingly, the following two analytical chapters (*A new real to empower action* and *Isolation, silence and absence*) might also suggest that informants could be grouped according

to how utopian or dystopian their perspective on crowd funding was. Again, that was not the case. *Grosso modo*, all informants articulated elements used in both chapters and expressed tensions that became clear during the analysis — and the fact that one or another informant features here or there in this thesis does not mean this individual has not shared elements from other parts of the thesis argument.

To be clear, I am not claiming that it is impossible to group my informants, or that all of them are part of a homogeneous group. Most of them alternated between different groups depending on the topic, the example at hand and on their level of reflexivity on the topic. For instance, experts were more experienced in calling into question some tensions (using clear and straightforward sentences in doing so) while project supporters were more fluent in expressing the joy of taking part in the campaigns. In spite of that, the hermenutical analysis elucidated the fact that both profiles expressed very similar enthusiasms and worries regarding the possibility of crowd funding and politics, despite the different wording and complexity employed in the interviews.

2.2. The broad and nuanced crowd funding community

Addressing the ways through which people create and reinvent relationships using digital medias is not a trivial task. According to Beer and Burrows (2007), a power-

ful way to address the dynamics of the internet is to opt for descriptive accounts, reconceptualizing spheres that are being redefined by online communities and tools. For them, the challenge is "to construct more complete and differentiated descriptions of what is happening" and to give an account of "who is involved, and the practices entailed, in order to inform and enrich new concepts or reworkings of our theoretical staples."

Moreover, when dealing with social research on science and technology there are two commonplace analytical simplifications: either social reality is determined by the technological artifacts (leaving no agency for humans) or technological artifacts are fully interpreted and signified by human agency (considering technological artifacts as merely subjects of human action). The idea is to be "in-between" these extremes, an approach that "allows us to understand technological innovation and social changes as an interplay between solid technological capacities, and the social situation of their development and use" (Allen-Robertson 2013:12). In other words, the idea is to be sensitive not only to the possibilities and limitations brought to life by technological artifacts, but also to the appropriations and semantics developed through their usage.⁶

That said, it is worth reinforcing that the technology put forward by crowd funding platforms is not at the core of this research as much as the possibilities opened by its usage. The technology is relevant in as far as it can be used to understand changes in the dynamics of society. As the next chapters explore, that is the case, for example, in the way a certain group of social actors perceive others around them (other people, other institutions) depending on how they embrace intellectual property (proprietary or free

and open source code). But that is also the case in terms of broader social impacts, such as the resurgence of the idea of the prosumer due to new communication possibilities and cheaper alternatives for production (Ritzer 2015, Ritzer 2014, Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010)⁷ A simplistic take on that issue could take into account merely how the mechanics of production has changed: on the one hand, the internet has decentralized communication, that is to say, in a different way from newspaper, radio and TV centralized broadcasting, in that the internet allows everyone involved to receive *and* send information over the network; on the other hand, a couple of decades ago, in order to disseminate a text one had written, one would need to spend a huge amount on its printing and distribution. As a result, subsequent to the popularization of the internet, it is now basically free to write and publish a multitude of texts online. Technology, economy and production as a whole have changed and surely these novelties and its impacts cannot be downplayed. However, observers like Ritzer suggest the social sciences has stalled at pointing out that vast change are taking place, while largely failing to explore in detail how capitalism (as well as other power institutions around it) are reshaped by the new culture developed among the multitude of internet users (Ritzer 2015, Ritzer 2014, Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010).

These overarching social rearrangements are not obvious, especially when the technological and social innovations underpinning them are in their infancy. Crowd funding platforms are relatively new and in cases like that, the mindset of members of this community is a powerful indicator about what can be expected from this new social group and its potential impact upon society. Therefore, capturing the world views push-

ing people into these platforms is the approach of this research. The idea underlying this methodological choice considers that social actors' conceptual framework can limit and determine action or, yet, can completely re-conceptualize it (Ragin 1994). Moreover, "at any particular time, one should be prepared to find that governing concepts can, and often do, lag behind the behavioral requirements of the case" (Ragin 1994:92). The combination of the descriptive approach suggested by Beer and Burrows (2007), together with the stress on world views, paved the way to yet another methodological recourse: referring to semi-structured in-depth interviews as the main source of data collection. I held 26 interviews with people engaged with crowd funding and throughout these interactions I could learn about how they see themselves in the world and collect relevant information about their own backgrounds. This context allowed me to comprehend their opinions, choices and values in an insightful way and it was then possible to conduct a rich sociological analysis of their 'governing concepts,' especially when it came to their engagement with crowd funding.

In some sense, this strategy is similar to Weber's (1976) and Boltanski & Chiapello's (2011) argument that underlying motivations and deterrents are fundamental to understand how society is organized. If this research differs from the historical and document data collection, it is similar to Weber's assumption that psychological sanctions that originated within some protestant sects had unforeseen behavioral impacts on society, and it is similar to Boltanski & Chiapello's assumption that a certain ideology can justify not only the engagements with capitalism, but always explain different and changing engage-

ment throughout time. In addition to my interviews, I did consult "grey literature" and press releases from crowd funding platforms, as well as other publicly available texts they publish on social media and blogs.

Some scholars argue that qualitative social research might fail in achieving theoretical relevance outside the field in which data was collected.⁸ However, when it comes to this specific research, a quantitative measure could be problematic. On the one hand, the amount of money changing hands, the market value of platforms, the number of people involved, or the enormity of the projects being executed would probably be weak measures to compare these new communities with incumbent institutions such as corporations and governments. On the other hand, measuring the economic impact or running surveys on people's opinions related to crowd funding would be strategies that do not interact so well with explicitly qualitative concepts such as world views and governing concepts that predate more significant social changes. Given the contemporaneity of crowd funding and the potential of internet communities to impact incumbent institutions (Allen-Robertson 2013, Ritzer 2015, Ritzer 2014, Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010), this qualitative approach is relevant for comprehending a wider movement that includes different branches of internet groups, such as crowdsourcing, sharing and collaborative economy, social networks, free and open source software and hardware, makers movements, hacker and open spaces and so on.

Mapping the moral grounds (Weber 1976, Boltanski & Chiapello 2011) and the conceptual framework (Ragin 1994) of crowd funding is a way to pinpoint ideals that

might be relevant to many of these new communities (for example, as in Taylor & Land 2014). As Bellah *et al* (2008:275) highlighted, approaches like that are able to grasp rich sociological insights:

[The] focus [on political economy] makes sense in that government and the corporations are the most powerful structures in our society and affect everything else, including our culture and our character. But as an exclusive concern, such a focus is severely limited. Structures are not unchanging. They are frequently altered by social movements, which grow out of, and also influence, changes in consciousness, climates of opinion, and culture. We have followed Tocqueville and other classical social theorists in focusing on the mores — the 'habits of the heart' [...] It makes sense to study the mores not because they are powerful — in the short run, at least, power belongs to the political and economic structures — but for two other reasons. A study of the mores gives us insight into the state of society, its coherence, and its long-term viability. Secondly, it is in the sphere of the mores, and the climates of opinion they express, that we are apt to discern incipient changes of vision — those new flights of the social imagination that may indicate where society is heading.

Considering the approach described above, the interviewing method offered in-depth qualitative understanding of the world views related to the emergence of the crowd funding phenomenon. Furthermore, this source was considered together with a textual analysis based on the websites and materials circulated by the platforms and the community built around them. The analysis of both sources enabled inferences on the social, cultural, economic, moral and political foundations of these world views. The aim is to assess interviewees' points of view, and to inquire about how they locate themselves within society — or, in other words, to grasp their own world views, values, references

and aspirations. Finally, these findings are invaluable information to propose guidelines for a conceptual framework which takes account of the social relations between people in the crowd funding community and social institutions, a framework that ultimately helps us in understanding the social role played by and aspired to of these social actors.

Although Wikipedia (2015) lists roughly 100 active platforms,⁹ this is clearly an incomplete list. For example, Catarse is a Brazilian platform built on an open source license.¹⁰ This means anyone is free to use their source code to build a new platform. According to Catarse's wiki (2015b) there are 15 active platforms based on their source code, roughly half of them operating in countries other than Brazil (including locations such as the USA, Canada, Denmark and Argentina). Most of these platforms, including Catarse itself, are not included in Wikipedia's list. Such diversity has to be taken into account in the interview strategy for this research. During this qualitative investigation an important challenge is to grasp the variety of possible different purposes behind different platforms. To contemplate this diversity, two main strategies were adopted during the sampling in order to understand as many world views as possible.

First, the interviews were held with three different types of profile: platforms founders and staff, people submitting projects to these platforms (project creators), and people backing these projects (project supporters). For each founder or staff interviewed, the idea was to interview two project creators and three project supporters — this would allow for having informants with differing points of views within the crowd funding community. In essence, this ratio was mostly used as a rule of thumb, not as a restrictive or nor-

mative guideline, especially because these categories overlap: most of the time a founder is also a project supporter or even a project creator; most project creators have usually backed some projects in the past, and are often still backing projects during and after their own campaigns. In spite of that, keeping these three profiles in mind allowed the analysis to move from an arguably idealistic point of view in the case of founders (whether it be business or common good based, just to mention two opposing examples), to more pragmatic standpoints from project supporters. In addition to these profiles directly involved in the crowd funding community I also spoke to experts in topics relevant to the field: scholars and entrepreneurs in areas such as sharing economy, tech startups and social impact-driven ventures.

Second, there are three main characteristics of crowd funding platforms to be considered. These characteristics relates from how platforms design their business model, to the way that they deal with their own intellectual property, and to the curatorial layer sometimes included in their service. Details about four specific platforms are helpful in clarifying and illustrating these characteristics, namely: Indiegogo, the first crowd funding platform, and one of the most widely known; Kickstarter, the so-called largest crowd funding platform in the world; Catarse, the first open source one; and Patreon, the first one to offer a recurring funding mechanism.¹¹

When it comes to their business models, the basic difference between Indiegogo, Kickstarter and Catarse is that the first one charges a higher fee (a percentage of the total value pledged), but the project creator can collect the money pledged even if

the target is not reached within a given deadline — this model is known as 'keep-it-all.' On the other hand, the other two charge a smaller fee (also a percentage over the total value pledged), but if the project target is not reached until the deadline, all the money returns to the backers and no fees are collected (nor any funds passed to the project creator) — this model is known as 'all-or-nothing.' Crowd funding campaigns under this model, they claim, are stronger in terms of engagement: supporters, in order to contribute to the success of the funding campaign, need to spread the word about the project if they want it to succeed. Supporters as well as creators need to work together to bring more attention to the initiative. Finally, Patreon inaugurated the idea of a 'recurring' contribution: instead of backing a specific project, usually with a higher amount (for example, 20 dollars for the recording of a music album), the idea is to contribute with smaller amounts to an ongoing project (for example, 1 dollar per month for a certain musician, or 1 dollar each time this musician shares a new song). If the 'all-or-nothing' scheme is said to foster engagement, this engagement tends to fade away once the project is finished (in the example, when the recorded album is delivered). Alternatively, the 'recurrent' method would extend the engagement between project creators and its supporters for an undefined period of time. Arguably this mechanism would risk a less intense engagement since it lacks a specific deadline and target.

Catarse is the only open source platform among them; the other three platforms are based on proprietary software. Interestingly there was a huge difficulty in reaching someone from Kickstarter to be interviewed for this research. Also, several interview-

wees (from other platforms) told the very same story: Kickstarter do not talk with 'copycats,' as one interviewee told me. If Indiegogo, Kickstarter and Patreon, by protecting their code, suggest that they operate as a more traditional business, protecting the engine from possible competitors,¹² Catarse opts for a different market philosophy, offering its source code openly without any apparent fear that some 'copycat' would be a risk to them. In fact, Catarse developers seem to express the complete opposite idea: they are actually helping other developers using their source code (they are very active in their collaborative channels: their open repository and their open mail list is dedicated to developers). Certainly the idea is not to affirm that embracing proprietary software is an indicator of a less friendly behavior towards others in the field of crowd funding, however, such findings cannot pass unnoticed. In order to support the opposite idea, that is to say, in order to disfavor any relationship between proprietary software and openness to connect with other stakeholders, one of Catarse's core developers told me that there were some conversations between Catarse and Indiegogo in which they intended to merge Indiegogo's and Catarse's source code. The merging has never occurred, but the point is that different stories might point in different directions, requiring the analysis to pay attention to specific combinations of characteristics and avoiding rushing into conclusions. In summary, the point is that these categories might illuminate one aspect or another, but they are not deterministic in any sense.

Finally, considering the curatorial layer, Kickstarter, Catarse and Patreon tend to have a more prominent curatorial layer: people from the platform tend to work togeth-

er with the project creators before and during the campaign. The focus is on refining the content to be published online in an attempt to make the project more likely to succeed. As some informants argued, this is the difference between having a thicket or a garden: they carefully cultivate every project, as gardeners cultivate their flowers, in order to raise the bar when it comes to the projects and campaigns. Indiegogo is more open and users can submit projects without the explicit platform 'seal of approval.'

In that sense, these three characteristics — intellectual property (proprietary or open source software), business model (keep-it-all, all-or-nothing, recurrent), and content policy (the relevance put on the curatorial layer) — are key points to link world views sustained by interviewees to the core concepts in case: contemporary conditions for politics, individualism and disconnectedness. Moreover, this initial group of platforms covered crowd funding in different countries. Patreon is mostly an American platform, while Catarse is a Brazilian one (in the sense of the geographical distribution of project creators and supporters). Kickstarter was launched officially in the USA, the UK and Canada (Canadian Press 2013). And Indiegogo (2012) hosts projects from all over the world, working with five different currencies (American Dollars, Canadian Dollars, Australian Dollars, Euros and British Pounds). However, in addition to these four platforms, several others have their own peculiarities, offering different points of view that should also be considered; for example Cinese, also a Brazilian crowd funding platform, is focused on meaningful meetings supporting non-traditional learning; Beacon, which is a platform for independent writers and journalists to get recurrent contributions to keep writing

new pieces; or yet MedStartr, a platform based on Catarse's source code, built exclusively to crowd fund medical projects (their catchphrase claims that ordinary people's interests, not multinational corporations, should drive medical innovation). By focusing on a sample distribution that covers all this diversity (profiles, intellectual property, business model, content policy, niches), this research covered different backgrounds, cultures, demographics and geographical differences.

3. Literature Review

Two recurrent topics on contemporary political theory are extremely relevant in order to address the possibility of politics through crowd funding. One of them comes from the antipolitics stream (Schedler 1997), and it argues that many institutions and practices that were supposed to be political do, in fact, weaken politics as such. According to this critique, a growing dissatisfaction with the means and ends of these institutions and practices has led to a general disavowal of politics *per se*; politics, therefore, starts to be taken with a skeptical and cynical tone and begins to be perceived as corrosive to society. By these means, it ceases to be the realm of conflicting interests, passions and desires. Furthermore, politics ends up either as a technical matter relegated to specialists or as a rational pursuit of consensus — both alternatives sustained by a strong belief in an impartial set of procedures (Mouffe 2005).

The other topic, subsequently, is one way to approach this contemporary political condition through the critique of rationalization and of utilitarianism (Weber 1976, Collins 1986), as well as through the underneath and widespread individualism and disconnectedness related to these ideals (Bellah *et al* 2008). This set of critiques argues that in the last centuries traditional republican and religious morals have been fading out in terms of relevance, being replaced by a culture that fosters the pursuit of self-interest in a way that does not create nor sustain social ties (Bellah *et al* 2008, Graeber 2011).

Both these topics refer to the corrosive aspect of modernization, which call into

question the promises of the Enlightenment. The focus of this research is based on these critiques from political theory towards the possibility of political action and engagement in contemporary society. Most of this theoretical framework discusses the modern world framed by nineteenth and twentieth century political philosophy. On the one hand, these oeuvres are reflecting upon the outcomes of the eighteenth-century revolutions in the USA and in France (for example, Tocqueville 1986 or Arendt 1973). On the other hand, they are rethinking these results in the light of the terror spread during the two World Wars, and, at the same time, taking into account the democratic states which emerged thereafter (for example, Bellah *et al* 2008 or Arendt 1998). The core literatures informing my research are political theories of the relationship between the public and private realms, and particularly the work of Arendt, Wolin and Bellah.

I also draw from other sources, including, but not limited to: the contemporary critique of economic theory and especially money (for example, Graeber 2011 and Dodd 2014); the growth of digital cultures and its commercial and social implications (for example, Palma's 2006 and Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010); literature from science and technology studies (for example, Allen-Robertson 2013, Tufekci 2014 and 2016, and Pasquale 2016) and the sociology of ignorance (for example, McGoey 2015), especially to reflect upon the ways that political action is conscribed by often unspoken commercial or political exigencies that undermine the possibility of effective public engagement in Arendt's sense. However, the more traditional and historical debates on modern political thought mentioned in the previous paragraph draws a steady framework to understand

politics within crowd funding: if the research question suggests a tension between the crowd funding community and incumbent institutions such as the government and corporations, this solid framework of political thought affords a rich and complex comprehension about these institutions. Beyond a bold understanding of how they emerged and how they ended up with some of their core characteristics, the idea is to consider the critiques raised by the crowd funding communities as substantial (in opposition to circumstantial or only contextual critiques). In other words, the assumption is that crowd funding might not be criticizing more recent traces of capitalism and democracy (something that might have emerged together with the internet). On the contrary, the idea is to frame social crowd funding implications in a historical and structured stream of social thought that call these institutions into questioning. In order to achieve that I refer to this longer historical understanding of the modern political system — which, in cases such as Arendt, requires us to dive into political debates from the Ancient Greeks.

Commonly this literature acknowledges the achievements of the Enlightenment, but, at the same time, emphasizes how it failed in completely putting forward some of the ideals that were at its core. For example, Arendt (1973) did not deny the importance of modern political institutions such as parties and elections; they opened the political career for people from the lower classes, and yet the notion of forming an elite through the party simply replaced the old elites based on birth or wealth. However, she also emphasized that the party framework is less meaningful in providing a government *by people* than in recruiting *from people* an elite to govern them. In other words, the central ques-

tion here is not the democratic (or republican) institutions *per se*, but the tangible possibility of political action for ordinary people. In a simplistic statement this might be one of the main points targeted by crowd funding: granting ordinary access to decision making about public goods that these institutions might have failed to deliver.

The first part of this section draws upon the framework of these critiques towards the modern state as well as its democratic assumptions and failures. Next, it discusses the contemporary debate that suggests the decline of political engagement in the turn of the twenty-first century, what would have happened, among other possible explanations, as an effect of the flaws of the modern state and society. Finally, it sets some challenges in thinking about political action in contemporary society. The idea is to grasp the difficulties in using traditional approaches to political institutions to understand how political action can be reinvented within contemporary tensions and conditions. This is the overarching theoretical background to which I will contrast my sociological analysis based on the data I collected. These critiques form the pillar for a sociological understanding of crowd funding in the early twenty-first century.

3.1. Modern institutions and its discontents

In terms of political theory, Arendt (1998) describes the ancient world as being traditionally based upon a distinction between the public and the private, two separate

realms in which people would pursue different objectives through different means. That is how she characterizes ancient Greece in many of her writings. However, this scenario is upheld as having changed considerably during the last centuries as, according to her:

... the emergence of the social realm, which is neither private nor public, strictly speaking, is a relatively new phenomenon whose origin coincided with the emergence of modern age and which found its political form in the nation-state (Arendt 1998:28).

Therefore, there is something essentially modern in the constitution of nation-states, and this essence relates to one of the core distinctions within political theory, namely, the public and the private realm. Following the emergence of the institutions created during that transition is a way to understand how this new political framework was forged. Moreover, this history sets the background for the subsequent criticism regarding the successes and failures of the modern project for politics. It is important to highlight that Arendt may have oversimplified the functioning of ancient Greece public and private realm, as well as how political action at that time (Ring 1991). However, even if it is arguable how precise her account of antiquity is, the typology resulting from her analysis is still valuable as guidelines to comprehend modern age.

The division between public and private was forged in ancient Greece, when one should keep the pursue of private interests to the boundaries of the household, the core place for one's private life. That is to say, only citizens who have provided enough for themselves and their families were allowed to participate in public life. This requirement was based on the role expected of this citizen when engaged with politics, the core of the

public realm. Referring to Aristotle, who was one of the first to argue in that direction, this is how Arendt (1998:64-5) described this situation:

Private wealth, therefore, became a condition for admission in public life not because its owner was engaged in accumulating it but, on the contrary, because it assured with reasonable certainty that its owner would not have to engage in providing for himself the means of use and consumption and was free for public activity. Public life, obviously, was possible only after much more urgent needs of life itself had been taken care of.

In modern times, in contrast, Arendt suggests that a distinctive realm takes on new rhetorical salience, the realm of the 'social', a space she sees as neither public nor private — and, as a consequence, this novelty has considerably dislocated what was understood as public. While private life was characterized by providing for the household through labor, and while the public realm was the place for action and speech, the social has taken the political space from the public, printing on it important differences: now government acts as a gigantic housekeeping organization, looking for provision for a whole nation; that is to say, labor, once relegated to the private life, is not only now allowed, but is placed at the core of political life. For Arendt (1998:28-9) the dividing line between the household and politics

... is entirely blurred, because we see the body of peoples and political communities in the image of a family whose everyday affairs have to be taken care of by a gigantic, nation-wide administration of house-keeping. The scientific thought that corresponds to this development is no longer political science but 'political economy' or 'social economy' or *Volkswirtschaft*, all of which indicate a kind of 'collective house keeping;' the collective of families economically organized into the facsimile of one super-human family is what we call 'society,' and its political form of organization is called 'nation' (Arendt

1998:28-9).¹³

This transformation, however, was not abrupt. Bellah *et al* (2008) argue that in the beginning of the modern age two strands were pillars both for public and private issues: on the one hand they mention a biblical strand; on the other hand, a republican one. The first of them is exemplified by the role of religion in the formation of what the authors labeled the American tradition:

The Puritans were not uninterested in material prosperity and were prone when it came, unfortunately, to take it as a sign of God's approval. Yet their fundamental criterion of success was not material wealth but the creation of a community in which a genuinely ethical and spiritual life could be lived (Bellah *et al* 2008:28-9).

Alternatively, the republican strand is illustrated by the standpoint of one of the Founding Fathers, Thomas Jefferson:

In general, Jefferson favored freedom of the person from arbitrary state action and freedom of the press from any form of censorship. Yet he also believed that the best defense of freedom was an educated people actively participating in government. The notion of a formal freedom that would simply allow people to do what they pleased — for example, solely to make money — was as unpalatable to Jefferson (Bellah *et al* 2008:31).

In both cases Bellah *et al* (2008:31) reinforced: individual "freedom only took on its real meaning in a certain kind of society with a certain form of life;" without those moral principles, freedom would lead to social corrosion and tyranny. However, later on in the nineteenth century, both strands were challenged by two concurrent interpretations of individualism that would pull the individual away from this large social context.

On the one hand, utilitarian individualism focused on individual self-improvement, reflecting the liberal belief that if each member of a group pursues their own interests, the whole community would testify to the emergence of social good. In this case, the idea of interests was basically set by another Founding Father, Benjamin Franklin, whose views were determinant in framing the capitalist motivation for work and accumulation (Weber 1976, Bellah *et al* 2008).

On the other hand, expressive individualism claimed no interest in material accomplishments, but in an individual and subjective pursuit of experience through life. The richness of life would be achieved by nurturing the self with luxury, sensuality, the intellectual and all sorts of experiences that could help them to express themselves. Individual freedom became the norm supported by this expressive take, and a disavowal for social conventions marked the tone of this branch of individualism. Therefore, if the biblical and the republican strands do not contrast individualism and the public life, these approaches to individualism play the challenging role; they do it by conceiving a sort of self-contained individual:

What is at issue is not simply whether self-contained individuals might withdraw from the public sphere to pursue purely private ends, but whether such individuals are capable of sustaining either a public *or* a private life. If this is the danger, perhaps only the civic and biblical forms of individualism — forms that see the individual in relation to a larger whole, a community and a tradition — are capable of sustaining genuine individuality and nurturing both public and private life (Bellah *et al* 2008:143, emphasis in original).

Therefore, this complex scenario in which modern states, government and cor-

porations evolved is constantly conciliating different realms and what interests are allowed in each of them; these spaces are the public, the private and, arguably, the social realms. It is from this theoretical starting point that this research looks at contemporary political institutions and the political agency of crowd funding. Having in mind the individualistic and self-determined world views which have emerged in the last centuries (as Bellah *et al* described) and having in mind Arendt's critiques regarding the existence of the so called social realm, a primary critique would be to understand to what extent the world imagined during the Enlightenment is conceivable nowadays. Put another way, the idea is to investigate if the rupture between individual and the public realm brought up by individualism is compatible with the virtues expected from governing bodies. Traditionally the answer to questions like these are suggestive of a negative tone. One element of arguments in such a direction is calling into question the effectiveness of free markets in granting freedom to ordinary people, that is to say, to ask if a rationalized economic sphere would promote the social good (or, on the contrary, if it would prevent ordinary people from political agency):

The market idea, as Adam Smith proudly announced, banishes the authority of persons; it is a system of exchange which is legitimate only as a system. The closest we come to an image of control, reassurance, or guidance is the 'invisible hand' which assures fairness. But the invisible hand is also an abstraction; it is attached to the body of no single human being (Sennett 1980:43).¹⁴

But this critique is extended to the public realm as well. Society has become "an organization of property-owners," claims Arendt (1998:68), owners "who, instead of

claiming access to the public realm because of their wealth, demanded protection from it for the accumulation of more wealth." Ultimately this means that the logic of instrumental individualism has supplanted Bellah's biblical and republican strands. This transformation has to be understood according to the specific ways through which modern societies have developed into representative democracies. Arendt (1973) suggested this process encapsulated a constant struggle between, on the one hand, emphasizing the anew claimed by the American and French revolutions, and, on the other hand, the will to consolidate the ideal of freedom in a stable institution.

Interestingly, for Arendt (1973) the concept of the anew in this context is inextricably related to this allegedly freedom brought up by these two revolutions. For her, and following the aspirations of the Enlightenment, freedom (in the sense of free citizens exercising their virtues in the public realm) was precisely what was expected of this process in which modern democracies and capitalism were brought to life. That was the whole idea and the whole novelty of these revolutions:

The modern concept of revolution, inextricably bound up with the notion that the course of history suddenly begins anew, that an entirely new story, a story never known or told before, is about to unfold, was unknown prior to the two great revolutions at the end of the eighteenth century. Before they were engaged in what then turned out to be a revolution, none of the actors had the slightest premonition of what the plot of the new drama was going to be. However, once the revolutions had begun to run their course, and long before those who were involved in them could know whether their enterprise would end in victory or disaster, the novelty of the story and the inner-most meaning of its plot became manifest to actors and spectators alike. As to the plot, it was unmistakably the emergence of freedom: in 1793, four years after the outbreak of the

French Revolution, at a time when Robespierre could define his rule as the "despotism of liberty" without fear of being accused of speaking in paradoxes, Condorcet summed up what everybody knew: "The word 'revolutionary' can be applied only to revolutions whose aim is freedom." That revolutions were about to usher in an entirely new era had been attested even earlier with the establishment of the revolutionary calendar in which the year of the execution of the king and the proclamation of the republic was counted as the year one (1973:28-29).

Therefore, if the critique of the social realm (in Arendt) or the critique of the banishment of authority of persons (in Sennet) are to be taken into account, what is at the core of this theoretical framework is the success or failure of the anew in the French and in the American revolution. The anew, in this sense, is mostly a promise yet to be accomplished, and not an existing product of the revolutions — and this is important as the rest of this research follows Arendt (1973) in using the term "anew" precisely in that sense. Yet this promise lies at the core of a struggle between the institutions willing to assure freedom to citizens and the impossibility of citizens to exercise this freedom exactly because of the way these institutions were set.

For instance, Jefferson had a particular standpoint among the Founding Fathers regarding the role of the constitution in an attempt to conciliate this tension: in ideological terms, he wanted the constitution to be strong enough to guarantee that no hostilities will take place in the political realm. Nonetheless, in order to reinforce the fledgling anew, this same constitution should also be flexible enough to be revised from time to time. In practical terms, the effects of these thoughts can be seen in the representative democracy model and in its well-established ways to participate in the political realm:

elections, elected officials, senators, representatives, parties and voters (Arendt 1973). A great many scholars, however, have argued that this new institutional scenario has failed in fulfilling its original intents. Critiques appeared as early as the 1920s, for example, when Dewey (1954:118) affirmed that:

... skepticism regarding the efficacy of voting is openly expressed, not only in theories of intellectuals, but in the words of lowbrow masses: 'What difference does it make whether I vote or not? Things go on just the same anyway. My vote never changed anything.'

In other words, this scheme was unable to extend the perception of participation from representatives to the represented: when it comes to politics, citizens seem to be disinterested and this fact can be found not only "among those who feel left out or mistreated or who have learned that the rules of the game often operates to their disadvantage," but also "shows up regularly among the favored and highly placed" (Jaffe 1997:78).

Sniderman and Bullock's (2004) idea of 'menu dependence' involves a very similar description of how ordinary people have a bounded participation in politics. According to them, "citizens in representative democracies can coordinate their responses to political choices insofar as the choices themselves are coordinated by political parties" (2004:338). The idea is that citizens are not free to compose their own menu of political choices, but only allowed to pick up one from a pre-established agenda put up by parties and political elites. Yet Wolin's (2004:428) analysis of contemporary politics adds another layer to this branch of critiques: for him "in both, the political and the economic context, contract appears as the essential condition of power". In other words, as the market econ-

omy operates in a way that concentrates the (economic) power in the hands of the economic elite, the liberal state operates in a way that concentrates the (political) power in the hands of the political elite (Wolin 2004).

All these voices seem to converge on the critique that the specific way these political institutions work is expanding, rather than minimizing the gap between rich and poor, rulers and ruled. And again, as Arendt (1973:253) has suggested, underneath this wave of critiques towards modern society, there is the displacement of the public realm itself (together, once more, with the dilemma Jefferson had in mind):

What he [Jefferson] perceived to be the mortal danger to the republic was that the Constitution had given all power to citizens, without giving them the opportunity of being republicans and of acting as citizens. In other words, the danger that all power was given to the people in their private capacity of being citizens.

This two-folded movement of the degradation of the public and of the inflation of the private has granted the space for corporations to extrapolate their private bounds and act within the public realm. Political decisions -- already distant from ordinary people -- gradually started to take into account a logic that does not pertain to the public realm, namely the logic of the market economy (Wolin 2004). In spite of advancing in many aspects, this process of modernization had a devastating side-effect for politics: by limiting the space for political action it consolidates the public realm as a place for private affairs. In Arendt's (1998:46) words, "the character of the public realm must change in accordance with the activities admitted into it, but to a large extent the activity itself changes

its own nature too."

The types of skills and activities held within these spaces were also impacted by these transformations. The importance given to labor and provision (formerly banished from the political), and to speech and action (formerly the core of political activity) have also been reconfigured in a different balance. Labor and wealth accumulation made sense in as far as the household provisions required them. Excelling in speech and public action in politics was a public virtue which the whole body of citizens would benefit from. Interestingly, within the modern social realm labor was introduced to the political space and, at the same time, speech and action was dislocated to the private:

... while we have become excellent in the laboring we perform in public, our capacity for action and speech has lost much of its former quality since the rise of the social realm banished these into the sphere of the intimate and the private (Arendt 1998:48).

From that perspective it is possible to comprehend the lack of interest, trust and reliability in politics nowadays. Also, it is possible to address the endless interest in making money. Both approaches overlap aspects in many critiques towards representative democracy, basically because they impact upon what takes place in the political realm. These changes ended up nurturing two kinds of critiques: on the one hand, there is a very optimistic approach to the rationalization and individualization processes. This stream, known as post-political, claims that the possible flaws in political institutions are to be overcome with the further development of these same institutions, according to the same values that brought them to life. In other words, more emphasis on rationalization itself

would solve these possible flaws.

Habermas (1992, 2005), for example, argued that there are two instances in society — system and lifeworld — holding different rationalities. The instrumentalized one hosts the market and the political institutions, and this is the realm in which the individual interests are transcended in the name of anonymous demands, realized by means of instrumental, strategic action. This kind of rationality is increasingly detaching itself from social structures, taking the shape of autonomous organizations that only communicate through mediums such as money and power — or, to put it differently, only operate in a way that holds no commitment to other norms or values. Economic and administrative rationalities are the main themes here. The other instance, the communicative one, would be the place where individuals would rationally pursue a deliberation, rationally agreeing on the functioning of the instrumental institutions. Hence, there is no judgement between instrumental or communicative rationality; rather it is conjectured that each rationality is restricted to its own domain. The problem — part of Habermas's pathology of modernity — is that communicative rationality has been colonized by the instrumental logic. The author defends the need for reconnecting these spheres to avoid the so called 'colonization,' keeping the differentiation and autonomy of these realms. He states that only then will communicative rationality have room to collectively elaborate the ultimate aims for the social good.

On the other hand, against this rational approach, some authors defend that rationalization would lead to a more antipolitical environment. In opposition to Haber-

mas's agenda, that is to say, arguing against the promotion of further rationality into the political realm, other scholars have claimed this would end up mitigating politics even more. Instead of using rationality to promote consensus in a post-political space, the idea for advocates of this branch is that this rationalizing process would harm the very nature of politics itself:

Instead of trying to design the institution which, through supposedly 'impartial' procedures, would reconcile all conflicting interests and values, the task for democratic theorist and politicians should be to envisage the creation of a vibrant 'agonistic' public sphere of contestation where different hegemonic political projects can be confronted (Mouffe 2005:3).

Therefore, the lack of trust and interest in political institutions can be described as antipolitical via (at least) two different arguments: on the one hand, it contributes to the mitigation of the public realm, which is suppressed by a self-regulated private one, the market (Schedler 1997); alternatively, whatever remained of the public realm has started to operate according to a logic inherent to the private sphere -- what Schedler (1997) calls an inverted Habermasian colonization. To be sure, Wolin (2004:588) highlights that both -- state and market -- are appropriating the methods of one another, in that "it is not that the state and the corporations have become partners; in the process, each has begun to mimic functions historically identified with the other." According to him, corporations' moves include being in charge or funding health care, education and other welfare affairs; in parallel, governments' moves include applying profits logic, and notions of efficiency and management to buoy its own actions. As McGoey (2015) has

argued, bold problems emerge when public responsibilities are dislocated to the private sphere (even in the case of the non-profit private realm): as impaired as modern states can be, they are still public institutions that are held accountable in some sense (even if only during a few seconds in the ballot box every other year). In the process in which states transfer their function to the private helm, modern democracies would risk losing this minimal room for political agency.¹⁵

The point here is not to demonize corporations or governments, but to reinforce how this conjecture affects political life. Bellah *et al* (2008:259) argued that, beginning at the end of the nineteenth-century, a populist agenda "sought to expand government power over economic life for the common good" in an attempt to fight the power of well-established private corporations. This establishment, at this point, was already creating, managing and maintaining institutions typically associated with the public sphere: universities, museums, churches, orchestras and hospitals. The argument of this populist agenda was that ordinary people should be able to decide for themselves, and economic power was taking this political power from them:

If the Establishment vision rearticulated important aspects of the republican ideal of common good in the turn-of-the-century America, Populism was the great democratizer, insisting on the incompleteness of a republic that excluded any of its members from full citizenship (Bellah *et al* 2008:259).

As discussed in this section, this exclusion operates in a blurred area with elements from both the public and private realm. Many arguments and concepts discussed

here — Arendt's social realm, Wolin's political evolution of corporations, Habermas's colonization, Bellah *et al's* crisis in the republican and biblical individualism — reinforce how important are the *modus operandi* of both the state and the market in setting these tensions surrounding political participation: on the one hand, the new institutions forged in the last centuries were supposed to deliver the anew, the freedom dreamed by the revolutionaries of the eighteenth century; on the other hand, these same institutions arguably failed in this mission, offering a fragmented space in which government and corporation are tangled up in their purposes.

Hence, the importance of these institutions, namely the state and markets, is crucial: they, as institutions do, have the potential to widely impact individual values, choices and actions. Yet, the impact of these particular institutions are at the core of the boundaries of the private, public and the arguably social realm — that is to say, these institutions operates in the sense of facilitating or hindering freedom of political life. Therefore, they are incumbent institutions when analyzing the possibility of political action in general and, in the scope of this research, within the crowd funding community. They are incumbent not only because of their generic coerciveness, but because of their overarching influence on the spaces and means for citizens to exercise their political freedom in modern societies.

In sum, neither the rational deliberation and consensus possibility, nor the agonistic one, have become a reality in contemporary political institutions. Both these possibilities require a public space totally isolated from the private realm, but modern history

has shown this is either a utopia or something we have not achieved so far. As a result of the fact that the private realm is indeed interfering in the public one, politics as such is impeded to work as theory predicts and, in a practical sense, is impeded to deliver what citizens would expect from it. It is in this scenario that a disavowal of politics nurtures itself; a scenario in which politics it is generally perceived as inefficient, misguided and corrupt. In spite of that, this scenario was not capable of eliminating politics as such, and people are finding alternative ways to engage in public life -- and that is the topic of the next section.

3.2. Action, technology and politics

The last section described what can be understood as a crisis in the contemporary political arena. The idea that voting would grant an accountable authority for the rulers and, at the same time, the sense of participation and freedom to the ruled, is, at maximum, an unfinished project (Sennett 1980). If ordinary people do not trust politics, the notion of participation in a public arena, together with the ideals of a representative government, are called into question.

However according to Bennett *et al* (2013:537), in spite of the predictions that this skepticism would move people away from politics, what was found was a 'skeptical engagement' with two different possibilities: "a context of mistrust and cynicism might discourage or pervert political participation, on the one hand, or spur innovation, on the

other." Their ethnographic fieldwork showed how civic organizations in Providence (RI, USA) strategically deny the label of 'politics' in order to better engage with the local community and in order to promote change within it. Interestingly, this former objective included activities that are traditionally considered very political, such as joining the city council, or lobbying with the local politicians and government. In a similar tone, Tufekci (2014:202) describes that in civic movements organized over the internet, people also refrain from the more traditional ways of political action: "they don't form political parties, organize formal organizations, file lawsuits, or other common tactics of movements with policy demands."

What the research completed by Bennett *et al* (2013) suggests is that if politics is disinteresting for people, there is still space for actions focusing on the public realm, on the common good. In other words, the political institutions might not be the instance citizens are looking for. Wellmer (2000), commenting on Arendt's political theory, suggests that possibilities created within a given political context might be the core of a public and active sphere:

Arendt's concern is not with justice but with (political) freedom. Hence, her brand of universalism is neither the normative universalism of human rights nor the inherent universalism of the modern economy. Rather, it is the universalism of a human *possibility*: the possibility of creating, in the midst of contingent historical circumstances, a space of public freedom (Wellmer 200:229, emphasis in original).

This proposal, based on the possibility of creation of the anew (that is to say,

the revolutionary promise that citizens would have means to exercise their political freedom in modern society), is at the core of Arendt's framework. For her (1998:7) 'action' is the essence of humankind, in opposition to 'labor' (meeting the basic needs related "to the biological process of the human body") and 'work' ("the unnaturalness of human existence," including the manufacture of tools to make labor easier and more productive for example). Action, in that sense, is held between humans "without the intermediary of things or matter." Yet the relation between action and politics is crucial to her argument:

Action [...] corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men (*sic*) [...] live on earth and inhabit the world. While all aspects of human condition are somehow related to politics, this plurality is specifically the condition — not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam* — of all political life [...] Action would be an unnecessary luxury, a capricious interference with general laws of behavior, if men (*sic*) were endlessly reproducible repetitions of the same model, whose nature or essence was the same for all and as predictable as the nature or essence of any other thing. Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives or will live (Arendt 1998:7-8).

If work and labor are held out of necessity, action is held as a virtue. Arendt (1998) differentiated immortality (typically found in Gods) from eternity (something that can be achieved by humans). As merely mortals, human beings can attempt to last forever, not as immortals, but through actions, through worldly deeds:

... no matter how concerned a thinker may be with eternity, the moment he sits down to write down his thoughts he ceases to be concerned primarily with eternity and shifts his attention to leaving some trace of them. He has entered the *vita activa* and chosen its way to performance and potential immortality (Arendt 1998:20).

Her concept of *vita activa* inherited from the Aristotelian *bios politikos* and from the Augustinian *vita negotiosa* or *vita actuosa* — that is to say, the possibility to create the anew is a prerequisite for this virtue, a kind of marker of "a life devoted to public-political matters" (Arendt 1998:12). Therefore, Arendt subscribes to the stream that defends that pursuing private interests, pursuing basic requirements for survival should not be the focus of the public sphere. Unfortunately, her diagnosis of modern society also noted that the public realm as such was dislocated in favor of the social one, a space in which this virtue is not necessarily a priority anymore. The social realm is governed by the necessities of providing, not by the freedom to create. This cherished freedom, a pillar for the idea of an active and virtuous citizen, is then at risk. And if it is at risk, the consequence is that any possibility of political life would also be at risk:

[...] action and politics, among all the capabilities of human life, are the only things of which we could not even conceive without at least assuming that freedom exists [...] Without [freedom] political life as such would be meaningless. The *raison d'être* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action (Arendt 1968:146).

Besides this displacement discussed by Arendt herself, there are more critiques to this Greek-based tradition of political thought. Scholars such as Mouffe (2005) suggest that this emphasis on freedom and deliberation is too optimistic for a space in which political power and struggles are arguably more relevant. However, both Arendt and Mouffe overlap at a certain point, namely, the need to support the emergence and maintenance of plurality throughout democratic societies. For Arendt the focus is put on plurality as

a consequence of freedom; for Mouffe plurality is the precondition that power struggles cannot be eliminated for democracy's sake.

Despite the more apparent tensions, there is a series of convergences in both scholars: first, when political institutions are barriers to the creation of anew, even for the ones taking part in it, the problem is flagrant (as Jefferson feared) — Arendt and Mouffe would probably agree there is no real possibility for plurality in this case. Second, the problem would also be flagrant when political institutions do not favor the emergence of ordinary people to the public sphere — again both scholars would agree this might mitigate plurality and freedom. Third, it would also be problematic to have a political institution led by extremely rational and instrumental logic. For Mouffe, this situation would minimize the importance of more subjective and human impulses required in an agonistic political sphere; for Arendt, this situation would narrow the boundaries between action, work and labor. In opposition to all these scenarios described above, both scholars would probably argue that the democratic process would only be successful when there is a public sphere able to host different opinions; when this public sphere is not limited to an economy nurturing the big family called nation; when this public sphere is putting forward people's dreams, and, most importantly, when this public sphere is forging different forms of political agency free enough to create the anew.

Hence when it comes to comprehending the political agency within crowd funding, the focus of this research is more on exploring the potential of crowd funding as a public sphere: a multitude of communities proposing different projects and actions that

are based on individual or group aspirations; a multitude that depends on a minimum public approval to happen (whether it is a purely profit seeking activity or an engaging activity for the public realm); and a multitude that, through technology, is able to gather enough supporters as well as enough funds to empower ordinary people to hold political claims and actions (in the sense that they operate outside the traditional political institutions, that is to say, outside governments and, in some cases, corporations).

The importance of technology *per se*, even if relevant, is not at the core of this research. However, the idea that technology is crucial in promoting democracy is at its core. This argument is definitively not new; take for example Dewey's (1954:110) words:

'Invent the printing press and democracy is inevitable.' Add to this: Invent the railway, the telegraph, mass manufacture and concentration of population in urban centers, and some form of democratic government is, humanly speaking, inevitable.

And even earlier than Dewey, other scholars were already discussing this relationship between technology and democracy. For instance, scholars from the nineteenth century, such as in Tarde's (1989) *L'opinion et la foule* from 1901, were already arguing that printing and newspapers would have a civilizing effect on the public. A couple of decades later, Blumer (1939) highlighted the importance of electronic broadcasting on setting the tone of a free society (even if he recognized the possibility of mass manipulation). Instead of subscribing to a more utopian perspective (such as Dewey's quote above), or a dystopian one (such as the centralization inferred by the manipulation pointed out by Blumer), this research is sensitive to how technology contributes to the con-

struction of reality, and, therefore, how important aspects of political institution might assume different semantics — for example, new forms of political leadership (Margetts *et al* 2013) or new social meanings for money (Dodd 2014).

At this point there are two important branches to take into account. On the one hand there is a debate on whether new technology platforms such as crowd funding or car ride and lodging applications (for example, Uber and Airbnb) are disrupting, allowing people and markets to enjoy more freedom and competition, or, alternatively, whether they are a mechanism operating in consonance with long-standing incumbent institutions. In the first case the argument would be that this economic freedom would revolutionize how we deal with our private needs, providing more opportunities to make and save money. In the light of the concepts of freedom and politics discussed so far, this might result in lightening the weight of private interests as resources which be more fairly shared among all — that is the typical argument of the sharing economy (Botsman 2010).

Conversely, this same phenomenon could be described as wealth trickling down to new players that would keep power in their hands without affecting the overall balance of power in society. Simply put, and in spite of the optimistic aspirations of the sharing economy, these new technological platforms might be just replacing incumbent institutions without confronting the emphasis on the private realm — this argument is typical in platform capitalism (Tufekci 2014, 2015 and 2016) and in the gig economy (Shaw and Graham 2017) debates.

From a more geographical perspective, Shaw and Graham (2017:908) reinforce

that technology has a direct impact on the way public spaces are produced and controlled through the flows of digital information:

From smartphone applications to GPS devices, Uber, Wikipedia and TripAdvisor, the code and content relating to the buildings and spaces of our cities is often as important as their bricks and mortar. Consequently, the power afforded to traditional actors of urban power — developers, planners, landlords — is now rivalled by the rise of new informational monopolies such as Alphabet Inc.'s Google.

This is the core discussion held under the label of platform capitalism. According to Tufekci (2016), the (once) open internet is now dominated by ad-financed platforms that require a high level of control of these flows of information. In order to achieve this objective, platforms usually offer user friendly digital services (free of charge or for competitive fees). By bringing users in, these platforms are collecting data in emails, messages, social networks, navigation applications and so on. This mechanism grants different powers to these actors: on the one hand, they are financially powerful as they have valuable data-based profiles to sell to advertisers, they are organizationally powerful due to the network effect and they are powerful in controlling possibilities in the public and private spheres:¹⁶

These platforms own the most valuable troves of user data; control the user experience; have the power to decide winners and losers, through small changes to their policies and algorithms, in a variety of categories, including news, products, and books; and use their vast earnings to buy up potential competitors (Tufekci 2016:68).

Interestingly for both sides of this discussion, sharing economy and platform

capitalism, the role of the current modern state is crucial; for example, as in Pasquale's (2016:317) conclusions:

As the technological reorganization of lodging, transit, and other vital services accelerates, the platform cooperativists offer a hopeful message. Even if governance disaggregates, from territorial to functional logics, we can still create communities of concern and vectors of competition. If platform cooperatives can balance those two imperatives — promoting more streamlined services while respecting fair labor practices and community norms and obligations — they may well be able to succeed. But they are only likely to provide a real and enduring alternative to the current, compromised giants of platform capitalism if governments give them some initial breathing room (as infant industries), and promote a level playing field over time.

This critique highlights the fact that alternatives forged within incumbent institutions have their own limits. In an attempt to implement a profitable sharing economy, entrepreneurs ended up following the same mechanism that rules corporations; as an effect, their power of unleashing concentration of power is called into questioning. Also, their financial dilemma of how to be sustainable is frequently an eminent dilemma:

If there were ever a need to expand our conception of humanity beyond the restricted "homo economicus" who works only for his or her benefit, the explosion of user-generated content on the Internet has provided major evidence. However, creative and altruistic output alone does not provide financing for servers, coders, and database management. As the public Internet scaled up and grew in numbers of participants, many websites faced a dilemma: whether to charge their users, or to sell users' eye-balls to advertisers (Tufekci 2016:72).

There is yet another branch discussing technology, markets and politics, one drawing from counterculture and hacktivism. According to Palmås (2006), these are

forms of political engagement that attempt to operate in a way that is marginal to the mainstream values and *modus operandi* of incumbent institutions. Counterculture attempts to understand how these institutions work and uses its knowledge to 'jam' its functioning. Subversive art and other strategies taking technology into account are ways to confront the mainstream culture by blocking some of its gears. In these acts the appropriation of technology is relevant, but not crucial. However, it is within the hacktivism movement that technology takes a really prominent place in this argument. The change underlying this statement happens at an abstract level: instead of merely using new technologies, the hacker movement (mainly the free and open-source culture) reads the world through the lens of technology. In a pragmatic way, instead of hacking into the city with an urban intervention to confront incumbent values (as counterculture might do), hacktivism tries to understand how these incumbent institutions work and ponders this knowledge as they would ponder a computer code; it is not something to be jammed, but something that can be reprogrammed for better functioning.

This branch usually sustains a trend of civic movements that are non-institutional and horizontal. The hacker mindset as described above allows members of these movements to easily overcome barriers that would be needed in order to properly build an institution for them. Instead, they focus on a thick engagement and even without this kind of institutional foundation these are strong movements in the contemporary public sphere:

Overall, this new configuration of protest movements and civics is

strong in some dimensions (attention, coordination, publicity, etc.) and less potent in others (elections, policy changes). Using the affordances of digital tools, protesters can skip over some of the tedious work of yesterday's movements but are then left with protests that lack the institutional capacity such work engenders (Tufekci 2014:207).

All these possible interpretations of how technology impacts upon action and how institutional powers reinforce that technology is a meaningful aspect for political agency, allowing different statements to be made in public. Crowd funding can be related to many aspects of these branches: even if born within a civic-minded hacker culture (as the ones described by Palmås 2006), most of these platforms opt for a business model undeniably linked to the entrepreneur culture. Ultimately this culture is a refurbished private realm operating at the core of platform capitalism; even if they wave a public realm banner, they lack sufficient proof to convince scholars on that point (see Pasquale 2016, or McGoey's 2015 discussion on "TED Heads" quoted in chapter 7, *Isolation, silence and absence*). Yet crowd funding is usually advertised as a sharing economy example, that is to say, a platform that would succeed in better employing resources to allow more agency (political agency included) to ordinary people. Surely these are useful typologies for this research, but as typologies the real value of these analytical simplifications does not rely on embracing one of these possibilities; on the contrary, it relies on understanding the complexities and tensions that make all these possibilities valid to the comprehension of crowd funding.

This complexity is not exclusive to crowd funding. Hacktivism itself has its own

share of tensions and contradictions. The ethical assumptions of this culture, for instance, "represent a liberal critique within liberalism" since "hackers question one central pillar of liberal jurisprudence, intellectual property, by reformulating ideals from another one, free speech" — consequently revealing "the fault line between two cherished sets of liberal principle" (Coleman 2013). Yet these more libertarian approaches collide with incumbent institutions, triggering a set of negotiations between the challengers, the establishment and the public (Allen-Robertson 2013). Hence this research requires an in-depth investigation of how crowd funding challenges incumbent institutions such as government and corporations. The focus is on identifying elements of a public sphere in the crowd funding communities cohabiting with elements of the private realm; from there the idea is to understand the peculiarities of this *mélange*: how does it differ from the tensions and contradictions within incumbent institutions, what kind of proposal does it advance and what kinds of values are discouraged and so on. In sum, it is not expected to find out a clear and objective direction for the crowd funding community. The aim is to understand which forces, with what purpose, and in which situations steer the community in one or other direction. In order to achieve that, the perspective of people engaged in crowd funding is key to understanding these movements and oscillations — and that justifies the epistemological approach on world views: it is more relevant to understand their political aspirations and expectations than to try to forge tangible and measurable parameters of concrete social changes.

In terms of these tensions it is worth mentioning that a hacker civic-mind

might weigh too much on autonomy, nurturing an atomized private realm; this would relegate decisions about what should and should not be done to the sphere of individuals' morals and judgements. On the other hand, the mechanisms embraced by crowd funding (from the functioning of the online campaigns to the dependence on strong and weak ties) require these decisions to be held by a greater audience: without supporters, no project sees the light of day; without collaboration within the network (open source included), no action is possible. Interestingly, it seems that a very pecuniary mechanism might be the argument for crowd funding to frame itself as a space closer to (and not more distant) from a public sphere. Either way, even in a more pragmatic approach than the one described in the last paragraph, there are still tensions and complexities to be taken into account in this field.

Reiterating the research questions, the literature discussing how technology relates to freedom and empowerment (whether it is fostering or mitigating them) is crucial to ponder on the specificities, biases and limitations of political agency in crowd funding. This argument considers not only the common (and arguably naïve) association of technology with empowerment and freedom, but also the influence of cultures and ideologies present in technological and entrepreneurship fields. This literature offered a solid reference to map influences and boundaries of this agency. From the political theory point of view, it seemed improbable to consider that any political agency within crowd funding would not refer to incumbent institutions, agreeing or disagreeing with them. The theoretical literature introduced in the last section, the one dating back from Ancient

Greek thought and discussing how the idea of public and private realms has advanced since them, plays a crucial role in this research: it situates claims, critiques and advocacies found within crowd funding in a bold conceptual framework. With this strategy it was possible to better understand the context, boundaries and innovative aspects of this political agency, especially when calling into question the functioning of incumbent institutions. As mentioned, the steady conceptual framework put forward by Arendt, Bellah and Wolin allowed me to frame crowd funding claims in a long and historical stream of political thought. Finally, the combination of these strategies allowed the comprehension of informants' world views, both in the context of the role played by technology in politics and also in the context of historical theoretical advocacy confronting or supporting the way the modern state is currently and historically organized.

4. Re-signifying money

To begin to free ourselves, the first things we need to do is to see ourselves again as historical actors, as people who can make a difference in the course of world events (Graeber, 2011:383).

Crowd funding usually finds in Kickstarter its most emblematic case: "millions of dollars pledged, tens of thousands of successfully produced projects, Oscar and Grammy wins, trips to outer space, and beyond" (Kickstarter 2018). Kickstarter is often taken as the example to discuss what crowd funding is about and about what crowd funding is capable of. And surely with all of this buzz there are also critiques. Discussing if people can (or should) trust in such platforms is a common issue in the media. In an article in Fast Company, Ian Bogost (2012) highlighted that what Kickstarter considers as a successful project can be a misleading notion: "'success' in this case refers to reaching their funding goals, not completing the proposed work or thriving in the marketplace." In fact, 9% of the projects that succeeded in Kickstarter failed to deliver the rewards they were supposed to deliver (Kickstarter 2018). This means that many times people are charged for their pledges but end up without the reward they probably were expecting, even though 73% of these users affirm they would back another project when time comes (Kickstarter 2018).

Surely taking crowd funding merely as an exchange of money and rewards would be a simplistic and flat strategy. Thus, this chapter starts to articulate the sociologi-

cal analysis of the interviews by discussing the way they approach money in their everyday life, the role money plays in this series of exchanges that are meaningful parts of their daily routines. Comprehending the nuances of their own standpoint regarding their engagement in crowd funding is the first step to understand their world views.

It is no accident that money is a starting point for this research: first of all, the platforms at the core of this study are basically set up to collect money, to fund projects that arguably could be funded through other means. Second, money is at the core of several sociological debates that aim at establishing not only the basis of modernity but of sociology itself — just among the three classic and founders of the field: money is a crucial topic in Marx's *Capital* (1992) and in Weber's *Protestant Ethic* (1976). Therefore, it is important to debate the role of money not only from the microsociological perspective (the world view of the interviewees, people engaged in crowd funding communities), but also from a macrosociological standpoint (understanding the role money plays in the constitution of the incumbent institutions of our times, such as representative democracies and multinational corporations). Third, and most importantly, the micro and macrosociological take on money are not opposed or disconnected. Both interpretations contribute to the pillars of the theoretical and political critique put forward by crowd funding communities: re-signifying money is the first step of a complex *mélange* that ends up not only as a political critique, but as a new — if limited — possibility for political action.

It worth it to note that money, in this chapter, is a concept mostly aligned with the cultural approach to the economic sociology. This approach does not emphasize, for

example, as Marx (1992) did, the role money plays as a medium for value to be exchanged. Also, the concept of money in this analysis is not delimited by Marx's concept of capital (1992), a idea that would focus on the circulation of commodities and a consequent and constant accumulation of wealth. Alternatively, scholars in this field of sociology suggest to study money by the way people attach social meaning to it and paying attention to how money plays a social role in modern life.

These works, with ethnographic basis, seek to comprehend in finesse the social meaning of money, the variations in the different ways and extent of its uses, as well as those of the boundaries and forms of currency through which money exists (Blanc 2009:649-650).

Surely this argument does not deny the potential of money to be accumulated and understood as capital. However it does not restrict the understanding of money in such terms, making room for more nuanced analysis, such as the classic Weberian argument that these social (and moral) meanings were in fact required in order to make the accumulation of wealth desired (Weber 1976).

As the next sections discuss, by displacing money as merely an impersonal carrier of value, and, as a consequence, by framing it as a tool to build relationships and empowerment in a network of relationships, the crowd funding community starts to build their political claims and to pave an alternative way to institutions that could be termed neoliberal, in the sense of perpetuating the nineteenth century liberal idea that a unregulated market apparatus is the most effective way to achieve economic growth. This chapter describes this first and crucial step for them to build autonomy (discussed in the next

chapter, *Autonomy*), which is important in understanding the way the crowd funding community call into question institutions that are based on a more traditional political and economic institutional model.

This chapter begins by describing how people who mostly contribute to crowd funded projects engage in such campaigns and how they see money in these relationships as well as in the rest of their personal lives. As the analysis moves on to people who have a higher engagement with crowd funding, the process of re-signification of money becomes clearer and more rooted in specific aspects that compose a particular world view. Although this process is not so explicit in the first group, a will to see ideas they believe in coming through is already there. And money — together with the freedom and power to choose which projects to fund — is what is empowering this will, making ideas into something tangible.

4.1. Playing the patron

Talita is a young professional who lives in São Paulo, Brazil's biggest metropolitan area. Every month she spares some time to browse her favorite crowd funding platforms. "To poke around Kickstarter is already a habit," she says. She first learned about crowd funding a couple of years ago, but she does not remember exactly how: maybe it was through a friend, social media in general, or a news aggregator. Since then she became

what might be labeled as a heavy user, pledging regularly in many different projects:

[When I first saw a crowd funding project] I thought "that's cool." I clicked and started to browse and to get to know Kickstarter. And I started to browser the entire site looking for projects to pledge in, and to buy a bunch of stuff through Kickstarter. I have, for example a bike flashlight [...], a revolutionary bike bell, an awesome one. I have a wonderful pen that is a 3D printer. I have lots of stuff from Kickstarter. Lots of books. I contributed to many student film productions. I have never got anything in return [from these film productions], but [I know] working with art is not easy, so they need this support.

Carla is another young woman from São Paulo and she described very similar habits when it comes to her relationship to crowd funding:

So, I have a monthly budget, something around 15 dollars, that I spare for crowd funding [...] But, for example, this month I contributed to more projects, I spent 35 dollars. Last month I spent a little less. As I am already collaborating with a few recurrent projects, this year I am sparing less to these [one-off] projects.

These two quotes are interesting in three main ways. First of all, these two interviewees represent a broad acceptance of crowd funding which I found among most of the people I talked to. Daniel is a German industrial designer that is also engaged in the community and share some of these habits. He has lost count of how many board games he had supported through different crowd funding platforms -- and he has designer furniture and DIY (do-it-yourself) gadgets to add to that list yet. He estimated that he has probably already supported between 150 and 200 projects.

Another Daniel, a Brazilian press officer and writer, has also lost count of how many books he had supported on crowd funding platforms. Adam, from Paris, works

with digital marketing and he is also as a filmmaker. He has supported many independent film productions and a few initiatives that he felt he strongly identified with. He mentioned two examples from this last group: one was a mobile application for women to mark, in a map, the locations where they have been harassed, and the other was a series of artistic interventions. Juliana, a postgraduate student from Brazil, has also backed numerous projects based on ideological drivers (such as feminism and bike activism), and also projects from friends and local musicians. Lisandro, a Brazilian psychologist and amateur writer, has had access to a lot of books, films and games through crowd funding.

These examples show that several perspectives can justify their pledges in crowd funding projects: personal taste and habits, political ideas, personal relationships, interest for new, creative gadgets etc. The second element that these quotes bring is that what all these reasons have in common is the feeling that outside this parallel, marginal market called crowd funding, some projects would not be able to succeed. For instance, when Talita says that working with art is not easy, she is saying that the projects she has supported, the people behind them, would have little chance to succeed with similar ideas outside of crowd funding. Daniel, the German industrial designer interested in board games, holds a similar claim:

It [crowd funding] is a really cool general concept, because it helps people that usually would not be able to fund physical objects but it especially helps them to get a starting point for the financial backing of producing something.

At this point their claim could be that either the incumbent institutions that

traditionally have been funding art would not have enough resources to fund more art projects, or that these institutions would not have interest in supporting the kind of projects they would like to see in their life. In these cases even a small pledge in a crowd funding project — together with a multitude of other small contributions — might make these projects become real. In other words, the perspective of the interviewees sustains that these mechanisms of funding is allowing a wide variety of projects to exist, a lot of projects that would not exist if they depended on more traditional funding resources.

Daniel even compared the German and American market in these areas: according to him, board game business in the USA is more concentrated in the hands of a few companies, with more traditional, well established guidelines for the development and launching of new products. On the other hand, he described the German market as a more open environment to new ideas: companies there take the risk of launching different concepts in the market, allowing smaller game makers to have a shot in the business. Therefore, he argues, crowd funding for board games has built a bigger and more active community in the USA when compared to his homeland. The lack of space offered by incumbent institutions, instead of suffocating the community, has empowered them in a different direction:

In Germany you have a certain board game culture, so it's easy to find a company that produces a board game for you, but if you come up with a new concept it's pretty hard to get a company to buy into it. If you want to buy something or support something that has an interesting idea, Kickstarter or a platform like Kickstarter is the way to look for new and interesting concepts that might not be generally accepted or whatever. This is the second thing.

And he added, after comparing the situation in Germany to what he knows about other markets from the games community:

There is not that big a need for the gaming community to go via crowd funding [in Germany], because they have the established [market] already being willing to fund them. It's not that necessary. There still is a community and there are a lot of, as I said, online communities, virtual things, but also meetups and things where you can present and talk about your games, and you have a lot of games conferences here, big ones. That's not really a problem. I just think that Kickstarter, or Indiegogo, or these kinds of things really help people when there's not yet an established way of publishing your work or distributing your work when it comes to design projects, when it comes to engineering projects, because the upfront investment is usually too much for a single person to leverage or to be able to handle, and many companies are a little reluctant to get into that. For games especially I think it's not that important in Germany as it is in other countries, but for other things like, as I said, design projects and stuff like that, it's still a very valid way of getting your new idea off the ground.¹⁷

The reflections held by Daniel illustrate a two-fold argument that will be explored in next chapter, *Autonomy*: on the one hand a calling into question the efficiency of the decision making processes inside incumbent institutions, and on the other hand, how money is used in this point to bypass problems of these incumbent institutions. At this point it is important to highlight how money is used in the bypassing step. Based on my informants, when they perceive that well established companies are not empowering "everybody," ordinary people can choose to support any project, idea, person they would like to support via crowd funding. If companies and government are not interested in ideas that ordinary people find interesting, these ideas can be funded through crowd

funding. If minorities cannot find a voice, whether it is in the public space or in the supermarket, crowd funding can be their amplifiers. To be clear, politically speaking, this last example is achieved through more explicitly political projects, such as the ones mentioned by Adam. Juliana also takes up this discourse:

I think that these kind of projects [...] enables a lot of debates that are hindered in our everyday life, especially when it comes to respect and empowerment. I have supported many activist projects. [...] In São Paulo, sometimes, it looks like that being an activist is considered a kind of crime by a lot of people. Take cycling, for example, or even veganism. I am a vegetarian and I am in touch with people from this area. I ask myself how to fund raise in these scenarios, when for the mostly reactionary population it [our cause] sounds like an insult. Thus, this thing of promoting and putting forward activist actions is an important driver for me — I have helped several projects in these areas.

Commercially speaking, similar possibilities are made tangible via crowd funding. Beyond Daniel's example regarding the American and German board game market there are other relevant issues: some products, maybe those believed not to have a relevant market, are basically ignored by incumbent corporations. That is why Talita loves some bike gadgets she has found through crowd funding, for example: none of the established bike equipment brands have succeeded in meeting her needs, but some maker did. The same is valid for the DIY projects Daniel has backed, or even in the case of art funded via these platforms. The interviewees strongly believe that ideas left aside by a risk-averse business logic can become successful in crowd funding. Daniel, the one involved in the board game communities, even considers that while big corporations invest a lot in re-

search nowadays (trying to foresee the probable success or failure of products during the research and development stage), crowd funding itself is a kind of market research; ideas are thrown there and the response is clear: some succeed and some fail. Furthermore, he argued, crowd funding can be a cheap alternative to market research, accessible for ordinary people or even small companies without resources for this kind of investment.

Wei is a Chinese postgraduate student who has acquired an electronic gadget, a solar powered wireless headphone, through crowd funding. In a similar vein as Daniel, he is a little disappointed with these platforms. He understands the basic idea behind them, and he was assertive in supporting innovative projects through crowd funding — it is a promising mechanism to allow new ideas to emerge as products, he claimed. But he calls into question the role expected from some companies that are using this system merely as a cheap alternative to market research. He explicitly mentioned that some projects on Kickstarter are basically used to call attention to the project. For him most platforms are slowly changing into a window shop for investors (and not as a means to make projects viable outside the corporation and traditional politics mentality). Similar critiques are also held from time to time by the media, for example in this *The Atlantic* article:

GasWatch is a real company [...] with a history of manufacturing and distributing products in the propane tank metrics space. They seem less likely to flake, but it does make you wonder why they'd trouble themselves to run a crowd funding campaign in the first place, and for as little as \$25,000. In short, because crowd funding is a kind of marketing more than a kind of investing or pre-ordering. A place to dream about a future rather than to live in it (Bogost 2015).

To summarize, the first point in this section highlighted the bold acceptance crowd funding platforms had among a certain group. The second point suggested that the fact that crowd funding builds possibilities outside of the realm of traditional politics and the market is important to understand this acceptance. Following this stream, the third and last point in this section sustains that the interviewees do not see themselves as merely employing their own money to buy things that are not available in the supermarket and shopping malls. They do not see themselves as merely donating for certain political causes either. Money is used as a political tool to empower initiatives marginalized by incumbent institutions, enabling a voice to the person deciding where to put her or his money, a choice in a world perceived as limited by options offered by well-established political groups and corporations.

For instance, Daniel mentioned the Karma Chakhs project in Germany. The urban and casual fashion wear had already set the stage for the success of Converse footwear, but later the media and some activist groups started to accuse the company of employing highly unacceptable means in the production of the shoes. After a major merging in the corporate sphere, the production chain became the target of reports denouncing the use of child labor, non-sustainable raw materials, and high degrees of exploitation. Instead of abandoning the aesthetic of specific shoes (by then already a trade mark), a group started a fair-trade alternative, via crowd funding. As the project campaign reads:

A hundred years ago, US Basketballer Chuck Taylor designed those lovely sneakers for Converse and the All Stars-Team. Those so-called Chucks turned into an epitome for timelessness, simplicity and re-

bellion. The problem about them: Ever since Nike bought the brand Converse nine years ago, they are being produced under unfair conditions in China, India and Malaysia. The poor seamstresses are being yelled at and badly paid. Whoever buys today's Chucks, buys bad karma. I don't want Nike to decide how those shoes are being produced. Chucks belong to their fans and that is why I want to produce my own: Fair trade, with good karma (Le-Mentzel, 2012).

The project asked for more than 20 thousand dollars and raised more than 150% of this target. A year later they were back for a second round using the same crowd funding platform; this time they were asking for roughly 40 thousand dollars, raising more than 200% of this target as stated in the second project campaign page (Hoffmann & Feddersen 2013). According to Daniel, this is not only a matter of offering an alternative in a market where the rules are set by big corporations. For him this is a social expression worthy of attention, it is a concrete sign that young Germans want to have a voice over the decision-making, a signal that if they care about what happens in the middle of the supply chain, they will find a way to put that idea forward. Yet Daniel added that if the same generation can have this degree of influence over (or, at least, this power to call into question) big corporations, they will also find alternatives to organize work and production. Namely, Daniel considered that several initiatives backed via crowd funding highlight and empower a new way of making business, a way that values projects made in someone's spare time, projects driven by dreams, by passion.

Maybe Daniel's take on that topic might sound utopian, but it is undeniable that the way people are actually engaging in crowd funding and also the way these people see themselves, highly corroborates Daniel's statement. As Lisandro argues "somehow you

are playing the patron, you are allowing things to happen, things that nobody knew, nobody wanted, or nobody imagined would happen." His choice for this specific term, patron, is meaningful. First of all, the patronage system historically has been present in aristocratic societies, such as feudal Europe or Japan, in which the wealthier could commission artists in a very subjective, strategic and personal way; it was the kings, emperors, nobles and popes who used to support art for centuries. They were in an important position that allowed them not only to rule kingdoms and religions, but to decide what kind of art and artists would survive. And that is exactly the sense Lisandro is recalling when he describes crowd funding nowadays: supporting a project is not a gesture bounded to the freedom to consume, or to the freedom to support a political idea. Supporting a crowd funded project is to exercise the power to decide which ideas will become real world projects, which artists, makers or business person will succeed — just as patrons.

This is not to imply that crowd funding power is as big as the power of corporations or political parties. In spite of this power struggle, this view consolidates crowd funding as a marginal and alternative power. In Carla's words, "we create, [we] hack this crazy system we live in; the more [crowd funding] initiatives the better." And, as wealth was important for the patronage system, money (even relative smaller sums of money) is important in crowd funding. Yet even if people engaged in crowd funding are usually well-off, this importance transcends the view of money as a richness to be accumulated: at least sociologically money is relevant as a tool to foster a marginal and alternative decision-making process, a movement in clear dissonance with the way incumbent institu-

tions have been exercising their powers.

Patreon is the pioneer in the recurring crowd funding platforms. Their "about" page has a single line text: "we want to help every creator in the world achieve sustainable income." Going beyond the platform name, this statement indicates that they see themselves as a tool to gather a bunch of small contributors to build a body that would act as a patron. Below this line there is a list with the title "meet our team" introducing the visitor to a dozen people. They are presented through a profile picture, a job title and a one-line description. One of the members of this gallery is Muppet, a "fugly" and shaggy-haired brown dog. His job title is "director of growth" (Patreon 2016). Surely this could be seen merely as a startup joke, but the choice for the pet's job title also points to the proper role money should play in this community — or, to be more precise, about the role money should not play: money is not about growth, accumulation or a first priority measure for success. In fact, Sam, an expert I interviewed, discussed precisely this critique:

That [this disavowal of growth] is new in the last 15 years. It just takes more for you to even be able to live this decent life in modern society. That cuts into profits because you have to pay your workers more and you have to pay for the resources you use or inclusion or whatever. Whatever was internalized into the market. That's a contradiction because capitalism requires endless growth, but then as the market expands to include more things, that free nature, the cheap labor and the cheap resources and why not, the cheap food, the cheap energy, then, as those things become more expensive, it squeezes profits.

Sam also reinforced the role digital platforms, together with the discourse of a sharing economy at play in this contradiction of growth in capitalism:

The idea is that we share more to consume less overall I suppose. I got interested in it that way, but had a problem with super corporate version of the sharing economy. Really what gets written about is the sharing economy by your mainstream journalism and what not, is such a conglomeration of different things, some of which really represent real sharing and some of which don't. I guess I wanted to write about this concept of the real sharing economy where you're not just providing access instead of ownership. Access to corporate-owned consumer goods that you share, but where actually the benefits of a project are shared evenly and the decision making power is shared as well.

In this scenario money is a means to make decisions about a great variety of projects, to have a voice and to back projects that probably would not be funded otherwise. Money grants social voice and freedom of choice not because of one's disproportional wealth (as it was within the patronage system), but because crowd funding allows a bigger part of society to have this voice and this choice. In other words, if this used to be restricted to an aristocracy (whether it is within traditional patronage, or, as in the contemporary model, corporations and political parties), crowd funding is making it accessible to a bigger portion of society: the technological part of the mechanism does the magic of gathering a multitude of small contributions and, together, they are powerful enough to back a multitude of projects. Surely this claim does not state that this is a possibility fully accessible to everyone. The interviewees' backgrounds suggest that being well-off is a kind of requirement in most situations, that is to say, one has to have her or his own needs covered to be able to spare some money for crowd funding platforms. Furthermore, one cannot ignore that another type of "capital" is important in order to engage in crowd funding: a minimum level of digital literacy, including but not limited to access to the

internet, trust in online systems, familiarity with social media etc. If crowd funding is a social and political milestone, it is still limited to a given social group. Even though for this strata, crowd funding is assumed to be more than an alternative market. It is seen as a space that better welcomes diversity, political minorities, a logic that diverges from the profit-driven business class and world views; a logic that arguably is dislocated in most areas of modern life.

This seems to be more than the emergence of new businesses that have not emerged yet. It can be described as a movement that calls into question the role of money as a rule to measure anything in people's everyday lives. In his recent anthropological analysis of money, Graeber argued:

Any number of names have been coined to describe the new dispensation, from the "democratization of finance" to the "financialization of everyday life." Outside the United states, it came to be known as "neoliberalism." As an ideology, it meant that not just the market, but capitalism [...] became the organizing principle of almost everything. We were all to think of ourselves as tiny corporations, organized around the same relationship of investor and executive: between the cold, calculating math of the banker, and the warrior who, indebted, has abandoned any sense of personal honor and turned himself into a kind of disgraced machine (2011:376-7).

The way these users of crowd funding are employing money seems to go beyond this financial logic. It does not deny that money is an important criterion in modern society. The fact that the power to play the patron through crowd funding depends on having spare money at the end of the month shows that money is still an important "organizing principle of almost everything," or, at least, an economic barrier to enter crowd

funding — what might be, as this thesis claims, an economic barrier to engage in political action. But at the same time the motivation to spend something that otherwise would have been saved shows a will to put some ideas and projects forward -- and this can be understood as a political action in the sense that it is more a public expression than an act of consuming or investing.¹⁸ In other words, it is clear that money is important for crowd funding due to its universal value, but beyond that, it is also important to note that money is a means to make political claims against the concentration of decision power, a contradictory manner to raise the voice against the way our society is organized.

If it does not question capitalism itself, it is questioning the logic capitalism has been putting forward during the last decades: the neoliberal project Davies (2014:156) describes as the "disenchantment of politics by economics," that is to say, the expansion of economic rationality, valuation and authority as a sovereign logic within the state. Even taking into account apparently disinterested employments of funds, such as charity or social entrepreneurship, they can still fit in this neoliberal agenda (McGoey 2015). Both sides of this dichotomy in which it is only possible to think about money as charity or as financial capital hold the idea of money as something that does not build any kind of social tie, of money as a mere tool for impersonal exchange (as Smith and most economic scholars defend, according to Graeber 2011). And this false dichotomy is precisely what the crowd funding community seems to challenge by using money to create political claims. Following Graeber, it is possible to say that maybe crowd funding communities attempt to escape this dichotomy using money to represent another kind of social relationship: a

relation of support that is not charity (the supporter usually expects something in return, that is to say, to see the project happen, or to get some perks), but is not a financial investment either (it does not fall into the trap of seeing money as a way to make more money). The following section goes further by looking at the ways through which people more engaged in crowd funding (project creators and platform founders and staff) extend this critique even further.

4.2. Money ought to circulate

If the users of crowd funding platforms described above could be described as an industrial designer, a journalist, a psychologist or a press officer, for example, it would be impossible to easily classify some interviewees who have delved even deeper into these communities. Many of them see crowd funding as a way (among many others) to make a living. Many of them do not hold a traditional job, and arguably they cannot be described with a single job title (or even with a couple of job titles). In spite of that they participate in many different initiatives, demonstrating they can handle a diverse set of skills. They can profit, for example, from dancing and teaching tango, from composing and recording authorial songs, from coding software or from specialized consultancy in the sharing economy — to refer to another interviewee named Daniel, who has founded two different crowd funding platforms in Brazil. With this variety of activities comes the lack of a tradi-

tional job title, and together with the lack of a job title there is a question that is repeated over and over to them: how do you make a living?

Pedro is a Brazilian in his late twenties. He mixes entrepreneurial and tech skills, together with a deep interest in politics, to put forward a diverse set of projects: from local and free educational initiatives related to technology, to publishing illustrated books about politics for kids, including running a hackerspace and many projects funded with government support, donations, his own savings and crowd funding as well. When I raised the question about how he makes a living, he seemed pretty tired of addressing this topic, and then he was very straightforward with me:

Well, this is one of the first things people ask, always, everywhere. And I think that for this person to raise this question, she or he either made the wrong question or has not understood a word I have said. [...] People are like "ok, but how do you make a living?" I just told them about a lot of awesome stuff, awesome projects and the first doubt is where does the money come from? The money comes. I can tell you exactly where the money came from in every project I do. But that is not the answer people are looking for. They ask me how do I make money because they want to find a way for them to make money. Thus, I say I make money just like anybody else: working. I work, people pay me. They reward me for my services. [...] And what do I do? Software development, consultancy, I have done publishing, video, events...

This quote is representative of a lifestyle that was found widely amongst these interviewees: I have heard several times, from different people that they prefer to count on several (ordinary) geese than to count on a (single) goose that lays golden eggs. Furthermore, Pedro's answer is strategic in the sense of calling attention to what really matters to

him: the awesome projects, in his own words. By saying that there is nothing special in the way he makes a living, he is turning the spotlight back onto what he wants to emphasize. This faith in the projects and in this lifestyle is at the core of his assumption that there will always be money for interesting projects. The focus is on his actions, not on the money to sustain the actions themselves, neither on the way Pedro himself is making a living.

Emily is a British woman who was part of a team that launched a crowd funding platform in London in 2011. They were pioneers in the UK. Like Pedro, she also discussed this primary focus on projects, not on money, as a relevant topic when it comes to the motivation to get involved in crowd funding:

I don't think there are many people who set out because they are like "I want to make millions of pounds." They kind of set out because they are like "I think this is a really interesting business model." It shifts things so that some of the most effective Kickstarter projects are the ones that effectively get user information, get to connect with users. You get to iterate and change your project much faster [...] and you get advanced orders, so the risk is lower. It feels like a much more connected relationship that those projects typically have with the people who will be using [the outcome of that] project.

The first thing to highlight in this quote is that it does not negate the importance of money: "you get advanced orders, so the risk is lower." Even though money does not seem to play a protagonist role, the connection to the users seems way more relevant. Therefore, a business model that empowers this relationship between creators and users sounds more attractive than a more traditional market exchange. Yet Emily believes that even though people who are interested in making a lot of money, as fast as possible, exist

in crowd funding communities, this is not what pushed her to get involved. Taking into account her own experience while setting up the platform in the UK, the team had two good, well-established references from the USA: Indiegogo and Kickstarter. She pondered about the position these platforms have assumed so far:

We interviewed with Kickstarter, Indiegogo, a bunch of different platforms just saying "look, we are doing this over here in the UK." We were even open. If any of those platforms wanted to launch under similar principles in the UK, we would be really happy to point the audience that we had at them [...] Kickstarter is financially driven. I think that is their main priority. I think it is something that is around, things like the environment [...] It wasn't a good fit and they just had no desire to really be open. Indiegogo was more open. They have [shared] a lot of their data and learnings [...] I think that Indiegogo was fantastic, they had a bunch of information talking about typical statistics.

It is clear in Emily's description that not every crowd funding community shares the same principles, especially when it comes to money: some might be more profit-driven, others more community-driven, others yet more charity-driven and so on. Hence it is relevant to understand how these heavy users and people dedicated to crowd funding users forge their take on money. A starting point for this debate might be their personal background. On the one hand, the kinds of choices and judgements many of my interviewees have been making seem to have been built throughout their life trajectory in spite of their family values. It was common to find people who, at a certain point of life changed their career path, changed city, job, professional activity and the way in which they make money. On the other hand, even if this movement configures a kind of rupture, they were

able to weave a safety net in advance.

Anna moved from a different state to São Paulo for her high school, and a couple of years later her sister followed her. She was enrolled in one of the most traditional schools in São Paulo city, one that holds a great reputation when it comes to quality in education. She told me that "until the senior year it would be weird to even entertain the idea of not going to a not so traditional university" — referring to the ambitions her family had for her. Fast forward a couple of years and she was graduating from one of the best law schools in the country. Next, she worked in great law firms before she quit to start a crowd funding platform focused on learning. Her sister followed a similar path, including a Master's degree in the UK, to later join Anna as the co-founder at Cinese, their platform. Their life story so far illustrates the kind of rupture explored in this section.

Arguably most of my interviewees have a great educational and professional background. Many went to the best schools in their countries and abroad. Rodrigo, for example, born in Wales, is a CPO at an American crowd funding platform. He holds a BA from the University of Oxford, a MS from MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), and recently he started a PhD at Stanford University. Among the Brazilians, many hold graduate or postgraduate degrees from traditional schools in journalism (Cásper Líbero Foundation); law (Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo); business (Getúlio Vargas Foundation) and communication (School of Higher Education in Advertising and Marketing), for example. As in the example of Anna and her sister, instead of sticking to a more traditional career path — something like applying for an internship in a multi-

national company, finding a job just after graduating, and celebrating a promotion to a management position before they are 30 years old — they change. Despite their outstanding professional profiles, and despite their family values that have been supporting them through their formal education, they decided to pursue different trajectories.

Surely this cannot be generalized. Among the interviewees, I have met some people that, in spite of coming from families that would support their formal education, have dropped out from college or have never started one. Still they were very successful in their professional life so far.

Felipe, who funded his Master's degree in the UK through a crowd funded project, discussed this rupture, taking into account his own family values, but at the same time justifying why he was able to do something different from that traditional career path:

We have been told about the best professions, we have been raised with this idea. A good profession is one with a good salary, because at the end of the day that is how we make a living, isn't it? Our parent's generation went through very difficult times, the country's economy wasn't in good health. Thus, it was a kind of *everyone for themselves*; and that is embedded with them, one has to get a job in order to provide some financial stability to one's family. Now I think we are in a different time, a time in which we can be more flexible.

Hence it is important to consider that when it comes to these interviewees, that is to say, to the ones more engaged in crowd funding, what matters is not only to understand their choice for crowd funding, but a more overarching set of values that pushed them to follow a non-traditional career path. In other words, even if they value money,

they do not seem to value the more traditional way which is, arguably, a way which focuses on a sort of financial stability. For instance, if Pedro held that he makes money just like anybody else (by being paid for employing his skills) one might suggest that there is no difference between the exchange going on there and the one in the more traditional labor market: someone performs a service and is rewarded for it. However, for most of my interviewees there are subtle differences, not in the exchange, but in its meaning.

Pedro particularly does not seem to like describing things this way — after all he clearly stated that he makes money just like anybody else. Yet his view on money varies depending on the context. At a certain point of the interview, when the topic was making a living, he sustained that "while one has money, money is not a problem; money only becomes a problem when one is short on money." His strategy was the same as described before: stop thinking about money and run your project, embrace the hands-on mode and if the project is interesting enough, the money will come. However, when discussing how he handled money in his own projects, he made a slightly different statement:

I think this hands-on imperative is always there. And money is not a problem, there is money, we can find how to sort that out. But having money doesn't mean a better situation. Usually when we make some money this becomes a problem: "wow, now we have money, let's do it!" [...] I don't want people focusing on the money. I want people to get involved because they decide to put their energy on it. When people run out of energy, if there is nobody else out there to get things done, the project can be called off, it's not essential to human existence anymore.

There is still a will to reduce the importance of money, and, by doing so, rein-

forcing the prominent role attributed to motivation, to personal values and interests. But this time even having money can be a problem. His issue reflects the classical Simmelian dark side of money: money dehumanizes social action, bringing corruption to the table (Simmel 1978) -- Pedro has to know people who work with him are doing that due to shared ideals, not because they see an opportunity to make some extra cash. This derision of money, together with the belief that there will always be money, might erroneously suggest that Pedro is rich, which is not true. He is not claiming that there is an abundance of money whenever he needs it. However, he believes that if his skills and ideas are relevant to others, there will be money — and this is what really matters for him. In fact, he makes money from public or private open calls and biddings, traditional contracts with the public sector, contracts with NGOs, informal economy and barter, among many other possible sources (crowd funding included). Therefore, money is an important part of the projects and of lifestyle; the challenge here is to re-signify it not as a wealthy to be desired and accumulated, but merely as a fuel needed to put ideas forward (as well as to survive, pay the bills and so on).

When I interviewed Anna, she was in the middle of a reflection regarding this same issue. She and the other Chinese founders have been running the platform for a couple of years but at that time the great question was how to keep it financially sustainable; and from this debate the meaning they attach to money emerged in bold terms:

We are in a kind of desperate phase. We think Chinese is already successful, it works. It's a great network, we have a lot of work to do, we generated a lot of things, but this is not bringing money in. So,

we got that there's something wrong going on. We are doing something wrong. And in this phase, we are trying to find out what is wrong; how could we change this percentage based remuneration, something that is super rooted in the idea of scarcity. It makes it more expensive for those who use the platform, so it's not what we want.

In their platform users post any kind of meeting focused on sharing knowledge, skills and techniques; in sum, any kind of educational experience. People pay to register to some of these activities and then the platform keeps a small percentage of these values if the activity is confirmed (that is to say, in case it reaches the minimum number of participants; otherwise all the money returns to the users). Later, when I was talking to Giovana, a staff member at a crowd funding platform, she added: "being financially sustainable is not the only thing we want anymore, it is also a matter of people saying 'there is a value in what you do.'" On the one hand, these two statements by Anna and Giovana might be challenging Pedro's belief that there will always be money for interesting projects. On the other hand, they are basically claiming the money because they do believe in their own initiatives: their judgements consider that the platform is going well, and even if they depend on their savings to cover all of their living costs, they avoid pushing the percentage model further (which, at the end of the day would grant them more money) because it is not coherent with their principles.

Underlying their reluctance regarding the current business model there is also a critique of decisions based on the idea of scarcity. They need more money to keep the project online, but they are very judicious when it comes to the means to achieve that — that

is to say, different means would represent different ways to see money:

When we had not perceived yet that we were not a startup, nothing not even close to that, we used to receive some proposals from venture capital. But then we understood that we did not want a traditional path, a traditional company. We were inside a different group, trying to reinvent what a company is about. A way in which the end is not about profit, not even close to that. What is this model? We do not know yet, we are still building it. But we think that if we take that [venture capital] route we will end up in the traditional model of income, and that is not what we want. We are not willing to give in on that point.

For Anna and the other Chinese co-founders, the core principles of the project should be enough to determine if the platform is successful. Yet in technical terms they believe that having more activities online does not represent a proportional increase in their costs to keep the platform running, so the percentage model adopted becomes problematic: while the actual percentage is not covering the bills, raising it would mean jeopardizing the main objective of the platform -- it would make it more expensive to organize learning activities through their platform. They were still trying to find a way out when I interviewed her.

In these settings it is worth stating that savings are an important (and probably a restrictive) part of their lifestyle.¹⁹ Many of them had the chance to prepare themselves financially before assuming certain kinds of risk. As most of my interviewees have a great educational and professional background, they also have opportunities to join high ranked corporations, jobs, and projects — that is to say, despite eventual savings, their own profiles and their own assets represent their own safety net.

In that sense, savings and highly competitive profiles in the job market mean that they are not (too) afraid of failing. It does not mean that they are 100% confident in their capabilities, but they are confident that if everything goes wrong, they can easily find a job, freelance or get back to their old careers and so on. Evidently none of them want that; in fact, just a few of them entertained this possibility in the interview as something really tangible or conceivable. But it is difficult to deny that they have a great combination of outstanding CVs, uncommon life experiences, a rare mix of skills, and the valuable entrepreneurship reputation that can help them to be offered a post relatively quickly in the market. Furthermore, usually due to their successful professional background prior to crowd funding, they have savings. All in all, they have a solid set of assets that could grant them a quick way out at any time — even if that possibility sounds like a nightmare to their aspirations.

This arguably solid safety net has influence over the way they embrace the possibility of making a living out of crowd funding, whether it is as a project creator or by getting involved in the platforms themselves. They consider that it is a utopia to actually live without money, so they have to make money somehow. However, they value the subjective meanings of money, as well the subjective means inherent to the different ways they could make money for themselves. From this standpoint, and backed by their own safety net, making money is put in the background but not really dismissed. Maria is a Romanian woman who, as Felipe did, partially covered her Master's degree in the UK through a crowd funding project. She is a journalist and photographer, mostly freelancing since she

graduated. She described her relationship with money:

I had a lot of thoughts around money and pricing lately, about asking for money and how do you price yourself. You know how much is an hour of your life worth, but also it is skills sharing, you know? How much is an hour of my life equal to someone else's who is giving me another service? How am I going to make a living as a freelance if I feel bad for asking for money? And I always looked at money as this kind of bad thing that I don't really want to deal with. I never wanted to be rich or have three cars and four holiday houses or anything like that. So, I haven't placed value on money in my life and I realize that it is partly because of my attitude towards money. And I really think I'm really bored with it [money], I'm over the attitude of feeling guilty for pricing and feeling like I'm somehow using people. If I would ask for [money] I would end up just working for free because I didn't want to price myself. Now I see it exactly like this: I wouldn't use out of personal preference but because it's still a very heavy way of exchanging and relating. I will then use it as a resource that comes and goes. It's not something that I want to hoard, but it's something that can enable me to put in practice things that are meaningful to me; and I think that is a positive, yeah, yeah. So, I'm working hard at reminding myself of that as well.

If money is not something to be accumulated, not something to be taken as a rule to measure a person's wealth or value, Maria's quote configures it as something that should flow. A highly competitive take on money, as it was a scarce asset, would compromise these interviewees' endeavors: they would never be sure if people are engaging with their projects due to ideals or due to economic interests, they would feel sabotaged in their attempt to disrupt the traditional career path, and most importantly they would doubt the effectiveness of their own projects. Cinese is out there to create and nurture a network focused on learning, not to make their founders billionaires, Anna argued. However, it is another Felipe, from Brazil, that better illustrates this point. He is one of the founders of

Softa, the software house in which Catarse was created. This initiative was the first crowd funding platform of the country and the first crowd funding platform in the world to be made open-source. Catarse is still the biggest crowd funding platform in Brazil. Felipe highlights the role Catarse has been playing:

Catarse is not a billion-dollar company. It does not generate billions. But for sure it helped to change the national scenario. To be clear, Catarse helped to change the whole creativity scenario in Brazil. Music, drama, comic books, documentaries, you name it. When you have a direct connection with your fan base, even if someone with money stops investing in you, you still can raise hundred thousand dollars easily if people treasure what you have done.

At this point of the interview I was intentionally comparing Catarse to the multibillion dollar Kickstarter. Felipe felt very comfortable with the money and experience Catarse granted him (he is not directly involved in the platform anymore). I could notice that becoming a billionaire or not seemed far away from his aspirations. It would not make sense to label him as a radical trying to dismiss money at all — on the contrary: he reinforced how people involved in Softa were able to profit from Catarse and from other successful projects. Eventually Softa became another company that adopted the motto "power to the crowd," meaning that they started to run only projects that they believed to subscribe to this ideal. But when Felipe was pondering on the life paths of founders who have left the company he did it not mentioning money; instead he referred to personal aspirations and values:

Those people mastered the technical side of Catarse. They left Brazil following a brilliant insight, "dude, I want my family to be safe." And then with jobs abroad paying tons of dollars it got easy to read and

show the history of civilization to your 10 years old son, and to travel with him around the old continent while discussing the history behind each place with him. Isn't it? Those are things that even with a 20 thousand dollar, or 25 thousand dollars wages in Brazil no one can do that. It's difficult. So, there are a lot of questions to take into account.²⁰

Hence the idea is that money is an important means to put ideas forward, to support projects they believe in, to sustain communities and creations and also to enable them to adopt a lifestyle that diverges from the corporative career path these people would have been believed to follow. Any of these possibilities corroborate money's inherent value as well as the possibility to exchange it worldwide. At the same time, however, none of these possibilities seems to lead to a moral that prizes the accumulation of money. In sociology many have argued that money is not a thing by itself (Dodd 2014) and that money ultimately represents social relations of debt, marking a never ending, back and forth series of *I own you* in close communities of trust (Graeber 2011). Crowd funding seems to embrace this social understanding of money, but in a pragmatic way that does not dismiss the utilitarian employment of money — and that is what they need in order to make projects tangible, in order to do a history study trip with one's own children, in order to sustain the rupture discussed in this section. Or, to put it in other words, even if money is a kind of entity detached from any moral assumption, its accumulation is not necessarily valued.

Later on, still comparing the revenues and objectives of Catarse and Kickstarter, Felipe added that the American start up opted for a tech shop approach, building

a strong network supporting the tech and makers scene. He also added that being in the USA is also a competitive advantage -- it is the first option for global creators, gathering not only pledges from Americans but from people based all around the world. And Kickstarter became quite successful considering these objectives, he added. One of the founders of Catarse also mentioned that Catarse embraced a community building strategy, an option to be closer to project creators:

Nowadays our success rate is 56%. For example, this is better than Kickstarter's rate. We are more and more working closer to the projects and thinking that every project has to have conditions to reach their target [...] When a project is successful, the creator wins and, also, we win.

According to him and to Felipe, being or not being a billionaire does not work as a measure to Catarse's success — just as Anna and the other Chinese co-founders asserted. At the end of the day what really matters is that Catarse "changed the whole creativity scenario in Brazil" — and, for that, they needed money to be circulating through their platform. Catarse's open source culture pushed them to open their balance to the public. In the year of 2013 almost 1.5 million dollars were made in pledges in successful projects in the platform. From that total 87% went direct to project creators, 4% was used to pay the payment gateway and almost 2% to taxes. Only 7% of the money is used to keep the platform online, to pay for infrastructure, and for staff. In opposition to Anna, Catarse believes that giving their dimension, the percentage scheme is working for them. They can operate at a low percentage rate, they feel they are empowering project creators, and they

strongly believe their business model is promoting change in the Brazilian cultural scene. This quantitative account that I have referenced here is only employed by them to support the idea that they are mostly a platform that facilitates the circulation of money, or, in other words, this account is only used in an attempt to distance themselves from the image of a middleman, favoring the image of a tool for empowerment.

4.3. The moral behind circulating money

There is a comic on the internet that pictures what arguably is a layperson's perception of a middleman; it begins with a building on fire, a desperate man and another character wearing a cape, a superhero. This former one also has a big "MM" on his chest. The desperate man reaches to the superhero for help: "My wife is in that burning building! Please help me, Middle Man!" The Middle Man superhero points his finger at another superhero, considerably stronger than him: "This sounds like a job for that guy!" The last part of the comic shows the stronger superhero flying and saving the desperate man's wife while the Middle Man peacefully grabs a cup of tea or coffee (DenBleyker 2015). The Middle Man superhero in this context is someone whose purpose is called into question: he knew the right guy for a given task and, as he was the first savior that came to the mind of the desperate man, maybe he took some credit for the heroic act; however, who actually saved the women was the other superhero.

The resistance to the image of the middleman among the crowd funding community is meaningful because it puts together different aspects of how this community deals with money: in their opinion crowd funding means a strong connection between creators and public, squeezing the room for middlemen in such industries as recording labels, publishing corporations and so on. Crowd funding, according to this argument, would empower ordinary people and promote diversity, since the approval of these middlemen is not necessary anymore. Yet according to this image the role of the middleman is an obstacle in at least three ways. First, the middleman is seen as a greedy intermediary who keeps most of the money, leaving almost nothing to the real creators. A common critique in that sense is made towards digital content stores such as the iTunes Music Store and Spotify: arguably those are businesses that pay a very tiny percentage to the musicians themselves. Second, these middlemen configure a market in which only the most famous and popular creators are able to survive; after all, with just this tiny percentage, only a high volume of sales would ensure a reasonable income. Third, in such a space there is a small incentive for niche markets because they might not reach the required volume to be profitable enough to assure a profit margin for the middleman. In other words, this is a power derived from a mechanism that allows for great concentrations of money; a power that, as a consequence, is able to decide which projects are going to thrive and which projects are going to fade out unnoticed. And these problems are exactly the problem crowd funding is trying to tackle in the first place: the idea is to create opportunities for projects that could not find a place in a world dominated by governments and corporations. The means

to achieve that would be to use crowd funding to connect ordinary people directly with the creators of projects which they enjoy and which they believe in.

However, a side effect of the position taken by crowd funding is that they end up being the very definition of the middle man in economic theory: an actor that conquers its position in the market because it reduces transaction costs (Wang 1999). Platforms help people find interesting projects and they are basically a window shop for alternative cultures. Platforms enable any project to have an electronic address accessible worldwide, promoting their call for actions, asking for money, standing up for causes and so on. It creates a hub connecting these two sides of the same business. Yet they also reduce transactional costs because they enhance trust within the community; a common example repeated by the interviewees is that probably a "manually organized" crowd funding would not be as successful as these online platforms. Trust would be a serious issue if they were supposed to make a deposit in someone else's account with the promise that if the minimum amount required to kick off the project was not reached, this person would transfer the money back. Online crowd funding platforms assume this role, bringing more trust to the network and reducing transactional costs. Furthermore, many crowd funding platforms act as a curator for projects they host (including the power to decline projects in some cases): they argue that they could have thicket or a garden. That is to say, if they remove the curatorial layer, the resulting "anything goes" policy would end up in a not so refined project gallery, a wasteland and its thicket. Thus, they argue that to have a curatorial layer is to ensure that the platform looks safer, more attractive and more reli-

able — a beautiful and flowery garden.

Therefore, they need a strategy to counterbalance the middleman image, that is to say, to favor the good parts of it. Hence, that is why the building of a network, a community and the emphasis put on connecting people, is the first pillar: it really creates a digital space where people can look for very specific projects, local creators, an alternative scene and so on. However, only connecting people would not work: arguably if it was supposed to work the earlier internet with its network of blogs and social media would have been successful before crowd funding platforms emerged. Money had to start changing hands in order to allow projects to thrive — and that is the second pillar of their strategy. It appears from my respondents' statements that money enters the scene out of necessity, not out of greed, not out of a capitalist mindset to work and to save. Finally, in order to trace a more definitive line separating them from more traditional capitalist middlemen, crowd funding platforms employ an undeniable political discourse: *they are* a middleman (even if they veil this fact) that empowers ordinary people, that fights against the institutions that concentrate power and dictates the worth for creative, tech, start up, artistic communities. This is achieved when they push the spotlight away from money and direct it to the "awesomeness" of their projects, when they measure their outcome through the community they have helped to form and through the niche markets they helped to thrive, when they distance themselves from regular corporations and even startups. They grant themselves the noble mission to empower ordinary people, that is to say, to stand up against incumbent institutions. They are the ones who made possible that music album

from the band next door, maybe a band already refused by all the big recording labels. They are the ones that made possible the urban intervention that gave voice to a minority the government insisted on ignoring. They are the ones behind the geeks who created that fancy gadget no big player from the Silicon Valley took the risk to launch. They bridged tons of donations to cover the medical treatment of victims who had no access to hospitals, drugs and doctors. And meanwhile they put all those noble objectives before money.

Even if this point of view on crowd funding sounds morally well-intentioned, it is important to highlight that it is not incompatible with more traditional capitalist environments. For instance, Deka (2017) describes how particular calculation happens in bazaars in India. According to her, at the core of a very competitive trading environment of small-scale shop owners, there are still social values impacting upon the negotiation techniques employed in the everyday business activities. "One of the worst insults to say someone is that he is *lalchi* (greedy);" and she continues: "money is important in the market, but to be seen as someone who is running only after money is degrading" (2017:458). Therefore, even if commerce is "geared towards everyday survival" (2017:459), it is still crucial for her informants to find a non-selfish ethics that contributes to the community; a way that not only includes moral boundaries, but also strategies such as looking after each other as a way to have a safety net within the community, and having this personal relationships ranked higher than profit as a safety net.

An ethical way of doing business is to be content with basic survival needs and not pursue unbridled accumulation of wealth, and, he [her informant] adds, thereby sabotage the chances of other market

actors. Govind's [which is her informant's name] business aspiration is to be part of a *chai bagaan* (tea garden) where different trees of the same size flourish. He does not want to be a big tree that casts a shadow on smaller plants, stunting their growth (Deka 2017:457).

From this perspective, if money is not definitively put in the background, the discourse sustains that money is merely a means to achieve those noble objectives. In order to reinforce what is underneath this idea it is important to clarify what is called into question in this movement. In the beginning of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* Weber (1976) refers to Benjamin Franklin to describe what was the *historical reality* he was taking into account to forge the concept of *the spirit of capitalism*:²¹

Remember, that money is of the prolific, generating nature. Money can beget money, and its offspring can beget more, and so on. Five shillings turned is six, turned again it is seven and threepence, and so on, till it becomes a hundred pounds. The more there is of it, the more it produces every turning, so that the profits rise quicker and quicker. He that kills a breeding-sow, destroys all her offspring to the thousandth generation. He that murders a crown, destroys all that it might have produced, even scores of pounds (Franklin, cited by Weber 1976:15).

At the same time this passage highlights two distinct characteristics attributed to money: on the one hand there is the property of self-multiplication, the idea that money, if handled properly, can generate more money in the form of profit or as return on investments — in that sense, what Franklin was describing was indeed similar to Marx's idea of capital and, precisely, the inherent accumulation of capital that takes place on capitalism. On the other hand, it reflects an arguably universal will to accumulate money, as this accumulation was perceived as virtue. In these circumstances money is desired not

because it holds any moral value, but because its accumulation *per se* became a moral value (Weber 1976 and Hirschman 1977). Both these views are contested within the crowd funding communities: they do not deny the understanding of money as capital, but they prefer to emphasize that money empowers action, makes projects tangible. Therefore, accumulating money is also put in the background by the crowd funding community: money makes more sense when in circulation, and not because it generates capital by circulating but because it empowers more people and projects by circulating. Even the need to save is debatable: on the one hand, they depend on their safety net (savings in some cases) to take more risks. On the other hand, accumulated money does not result in action, does not help them to achieve their life aspirations.

Contemporary Marxists have been debating immaterial forms of producing value, namely the production of social organization (Böhm and Land 2012). Therefore, this apparent contempt for money resonates a strategy in which other kinds of values (than money) are being produced and reproduced within the *modus operandi* of the crowd funding community; or, in Böhm and Land (2012:224) words, "value production shifts from the material production of tangible commodities to the immaterial production of social relationships, knowledge and affect." In that sense, the emphasis put on the circulation of money is strategic in a very political and economic way; a way that embraces different aspects of society to assure the social reproduction of the organizational ideas put forward by the crowd funding community:

Under the factory system, necessary and surplus labour were com-

bined to such a degree that they became indistinguishable, whereas formerly they had been spatially and temporally separated, and it took Marx's analysis to separate them out again. Without this analytical, but also political, separation, enabled by the labour theory of value, there is no clear understanding of exploitation as the material basis of surplus value. Now [...] we are witnessing a further shift where the 'necessary' and 'surplus' labour of social reproduction appear indistinguishable. Both occur simultaneously and throughout the full circuit from production to consumption. But this does not mean that we should simply give up on the analytical and critical project of distinguishing these elements (Böhm and Land 2012:234-5).

In other words, by dismissing the idea of accumulating wealth, the process of re-signifying money within the crowd funding community seems to challenge the idea of capital: in spite of the emphasis on circulation, the purpose is not accumulation (as it is in Marx's capital). However, according to Marx (1992) the accumulation of capital would work in the direction of sustaining and reproducing certain social structures, namely the capitalist division of labor and ownership of the means of production. In that sense, the emphasis put by the crowd funding community on circulation might be read as a strategy to sustain and reproduce the social organization they are creating for them. Once more, money and its meanings (including the strictly economic one) is strategically used to forge social structures.

Regarding the moral question surrounding money, it is valuable to discuss how it is possible to assume that money can be, at the same time, a kind of amoral and universal measure, as well as an entity endowed of with moral judgements (Zelizer, 1994 and 2007). In heterodox economics, for instance, Hirschman (1977) described how the En-

lightenment reframed *passions* into economic and commercial terms such as *interest*, that is to say, as the belief grew that self-interest made civility possible, thus a rehumanizing of the profit motive took place, endowed with a positive moral value. Within sociology, Weber (1976:116) argued that the asceticism of certain Protestant religions condemned the enjoyment of life in the form of consumption, leading to an "accumulation of capital through ascetic compulsion to save":

The capitalistic system so needs this devotion to the calling of making money, it is an attitude toward material goods which is so well suited to that system, so intimately bound up with the conditions of survival in the economic struggle of existence, that there can today no longer be any question of necessary connection of that acquisitive manner of life with any single *Weltanschauung*. In fact, it no longer needs the support of any religious forces, and feels the attempts of religion to influence economic life, in so far as they can still be felt at all, to be as much as an unjustified interference as its regulation by the State (Weber 1976:33-4).

Weltanschauung is a German term for world view. This chapter has described how people involved in crowd funding are departing from, and at the same time are forging an alternative world view. And this alternative world view is the one in charge of attributing to money a different aura than the one of this "devotion to the calling of making money" -- crowd funding has its own calling, that is to say, from the logic of the institutions that share an understanding of money as something to be accumulated, from the logic of institutions that assure their own power through the accumulation of money. Money with crowd funding communities becomes something that should circulate, an approach closer to what Dodd's (2014) described as a "utopian money."

Finally, by attempting to challenge these incumbent institutions, the main players in the neoliberal market, as well the government supporting these economic policies, crowd funding establishes itself as a political discourse. In Graeber's *Debt* (2011), he asserts that it is possible to make such a political claim by re-signifying money:

The only thing that's clear is that new ideas won't emerge without the jettisoning of much of our accustomed categories of thought [...] and formulating new ones. This is why I spent so much of this book talking about the market, but also about the false choice between state and market that so monopolized political ideology for the last centuries that it made it difficult to argue about anything else (Graeber 2011:384).

Crowd funding communities seem to be in the stream of this argument. By re-signifying money in their everyday live they contribute to a new world view that discusses the arguably false opposition between market and state. Ironically this is achieved through one pillar of the neoliberal capitalism and another one from the democratic modern states: the idea of the middleman and the idea that the state might not properly look after minorities. Those paradoxes are not denied, but the strategy they adopt is clearly pushing them in the direction of the positive interpretation of what they could represent. In other words, they fine tune their strategy to focus on politics, and they distance themselves from the matters of business or management. And in fact there is some consistency in that claim: the next chapter explores how this re-signified and circulating money empowers autonomy, an important aspect to *action* (as in Arendt 1998).

5. Autonomy

Action would be an unnecessary luxury, a capricious interference with general laws of behavior, if men (sic) were endlessly reproducible repetitions of the same model, whose nature or essence was the same for all and as predictable as the nature or essence of any other thing. Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives or will live (Arendt 1973:8).

The last chapter's discussion of money is one element of a complex mélange that defines a specific world view widely adopted by the crowd funding community. Another element of this mélange is the understanding of what is at stake when this community purportedly adopts an alternative and marginal lifestyle -- especially when it comes to the notion of making a living out of a career. Maybe a first impression about people who are trying to re-signify money would point towards a utopia, a desire to change the world. And in fact that was what Felipe told me:

[The Bachelor's degree in] geography gave me incredible tools to work with sustainability. And then, when I was 20, 22 years old I was totally addicted to working and changing the world. And I'd work as hard as possible, for free, out of passion.

Before starting his partially crowd funded Master's degree he had been an undergraduate student in two different fields: economics and geography. He opted for these courses because he felt the world was sick and needed to be saved: he would claim natural resources were disappearing, escalating levels of pollution were condemning the environment, and people were deeply deluded and exhausted in their obsession for work and

making a living. The result, according to him, was a toxic world with serious personal and social issues. This situation was unbearable for him and thus he thought something had to be done.

When he was beginning his higher education, Felipe went for economics because, as he put, "it would provide me with knowledge about the system, about social life, and later I could get into ecology, ecological economics, green economy." The *system* is a concept that many interviewees would use to address the overarching values fostered by the incumbent institutions, such as the corporative market and the nation states. After a couple of years Felipe changed his mind: "I had taken a too long diversion to actually get to the point where I could study sustainability, study labor, cultural and social alternatives." He started to look for alternatives and geography seemed like a good idea: "according to the program I would study natural sciences, social science, humanities and the correlation between them." He then changed from economics to geography, trying to do something to save the world -- or, at least, trying to prepare himself to do so.

From this background it is comprehensible that when he graduated he was up to pursue arguably overarching objectives: he was aiming at changing the world, at changing the system. Later, at the time of the interview, Felipe himself would label these objectives as naïve:

I have worked for NGOs, it is a little bit of my trajectory. And there are other things. I have worked in the market for big companies such as Petrobras which is a semi-public corporation.²² And I have worked for small initiatives too. I started to see that I did not believe in the idea that we would change the system from inside out. [...]

Actually, I do not think it is about changing the system. I think it is all about bringing an alternative, from the outside — that is why my blog is called *On the Edge*, it is a culture living in the margins, it flirts with the real and the anew, what is not there yet.

His Master's degree focused on the collaborative economy. According to him this route seemed promising because "it moves away from the default of changing the system." Specifically, he claims that this route does not take a combative position against the system (or, at least, against the monetary system, as he mentioned in the interview): "let's leave the monetary system there, let it go. It will change if it has to." Yet he thinks it is a waste of time to fight the monetary system, it is like "throwing small stones against a big wall."

Interestingly, his position does not imply that he had abandoned the idea of doing something to make the world a better place. It means he had scaled down his actions, keeping his ambitions as high as they were before. Once he realized he will not change the system from inside out, he adopted a new strategy that focuses on small actions, on possibilities within his reach. It is not about solving the problem for everybody, it is not a revolutionary take on the world. It dismisses the global and outward expectation of *changing the world* and replacing it with a local and inward version of it.

Engage was one startup from Brazil that used to work under the motto *power to the people*. One of their co-founders summarized this process described by Felipe in a few words (as this co-founder has himself been through a similar change in terms of life objectives):

Engage was built with that 'change the world' idea in mind. And my history with Engage was all about getting tired of this chip chatting. But I do believe we are changing the world. I do not consider myself a dreamer. I am a very pragmatic guy who, at the same time, dreams a lot -- otherwise I would not be able to be pragmatic.

Life stories like that raise important topics for discussion, topics that clearly take the process of the re-signification of money to another level — to be more precise, topics that justify this re-signification with a more specific purpose. Governments and corporations can act as constraints to actions and thus the strategy is to minimize the relevance of these institutions within the crowd funding communities' lifestyle -- namely what they are pursuing is autonomy. It is the case that the approach to autonomy discussed here emerged from the fieldwork and the idea is not to measure, corroborate or deny how autonomous my informants really are. What is relevant is to understand what they see as autonomy, how they pursue it, why they do it, and how this relates to the social and political framing of their choices.

As this chapter describes, there are similarities and differences in terms of the rejection of corporations and government. Although it is common to see the disavowal for both coming together from time to time, the corporative alternative is seen as an alternative to the boundaries of the other -- in other words, even when not completely discarded, the government is hardly ever seen as efficient in terms of granting the autonomy which the crowd funding community is looking for. On that point it is interesting to see what the expected role of institutions is: on the one hand it really seems that states in general are losing their appeal as an authority (for example, as in Wolin 2004); but on the other hand,

if people are free to explore new economic arrangements and new social relationships (as in crowd funding) some institutions might be responsible for the freedom empowering these novelties.

To be clear, the question raised in the last paragraph relates to Berlin's (1999) positive and negative freedom -- or in other words *freedom for* and *freedom from*. While the latter refers to situations in which there is an absence of interference in one's actions, the first one emphasizes the deciding power (over the possibility of being decided for). In that context it is prudent to explore the following discussion on autonomy, having in mind some recent institutional transformations that are crucial to comprehend how my interviewees relate freedom and autonomy to these institutions they seem to reject. For instance, Wolin (2004:588) suggests that:

The changes in capitalism have weakened the authority of the state as the supreme power in society. Globalization is the euphemism for continuous expansion abroad and the constriction of politics at home, narrowing the points of entry so that only the pressure of money can gain political access [...] Although the state continues to play a far from negligible role in an increasingly globalized economy, the power wielded by multinational corporations has made their cooperation and acquiescence indispensable. The cooperation of corporate power is now a vital element of domestic, foreign and military politics. Competition and rivalry occur less between state and corporations and more between corporations vying for influence over the state or subsidies from it.

According to Wolin (2004), what used to be seen as traditional roles expected from government started to be played by corporations: instead of merely paying salaries to employees, the private sector started to provide a wider community with funding to

cultural and educational initiatives, for example. But at the same time money replaced citizenry as the core of quality measure for success and failures within many national and regional democratic institutions: "state actors have become dependent more on corporate power than on their own citizens" (Wolin 2004:589).

Finally, Wolin (2004:586) suggests two opposing political tendencies to deal with this situation: a centrifugal one that "fears democracy because it homogenizes suppressing significant differences in favor of a monolithic ideal of 'the people'" and a centripetal one which "is contemptuous of democracy for its weakness yet envious of its appeal." Maybe the way my interviewees downplay government is a signal that they are closer to this second tendency — precisely the tendency Wolin (2004:587) believes to be the least promising for democracy:

Whatever remains of democratic possibilities lies with the centrifugal forces. Yet their political prospects are the more problematical. For despite their critical attitudes towards the state — perhaps all — of the major centrifugal groups look to government for assistance and protection and to its courts for relief. This requires some accommodation to the political culture that surrounds the national government and many state governments, and that, increasingly, has become indistinguishable from corporate culture.

This chapter looks into the strategies the crowd funding community has traced in order to grant themselves more autonomy. This attempt involves a series of rejections of certain institutions and would be best described as an attempt to pave an alternative way that is independent from these rejected institutions. And this is because what is at stake is not a confrontation, but the relegation of the importance of some institutions. From

the sociological perspective there are tensions in the struggle to reject institutions, especially when they are incumbent in the modern states and that is the case of corporation and governments. The first part of the chapter focuses on a more optimistic branch: people for whom corporations and governments are problematic but who still act in the sense of trying to change these institutions. The second part is based on more radical accounts in which the rejection is so bold that they usually try to opt-out of the power of these incumbent institutions. Interestingly, in both cases they distance themselves from the institutions without confrontation, and from their choices they end up building a new set of values that, for them, minimizes the importance of these institutions. This is the core of their pursuit of autonomy -- not only for themselves, but for all the peers taking part in this endeavor.

5.1. Hacking incumbent institutions

Autonomy is a major drive in my interviewees' choices and this specific criterion leads them to perceive institutions as obstacles to fulfilling their life expectations. However, not all institutions are barriers and a lot of judgement takes place in their strategies to position themselves into the world, to pursue their ideal of autonomy. Their movements accepting or denying certain institutions are revealing of what they understand as autonomy. Felipe's case, for instance, points towards the problems of trying to pro-

mote change from the inside out, but a lot of other interviewees believe that institutional arrangements can help them in the arduous task of making a difference in an arguably sick world, as Felipe has describe it in his interview. Carla, for instance, started a promising career in the advertising market but at a certain point she started to have similar thoughts to Felipe:

I hold a degree in advertisement, I worked for 10 years in advertisement agencies with planning and research. Then a couple of years ago I started to realize that all my investment in terms of time, of daily efforts, of commuting, and of focus on the projects I run, all that was kind of useless. I worked in an agency and I was part of a process that would end up in a banner in the end of the day. It was a communication piece that would only feed this Machiavellian system.

Carla was pondering not merely her dissatisfaction with her job. Her reflections target two very specific things. First, the purpose of the market she was contributing to and how she felt about it is encompassed in her use of the term "Machiavellian," which characterizes this market as unscrupulous — and it is noteworthy that, similar to Felipe, she emphasizes the coercion of this mindset by labeling it as a "system." It is not merely the Marxist alienation of the workers from their products, but a deeper alienation ranging from their professional activity to their species being (Marx 2007). What my informants are describing is an intimate disapproval of how professional life is organized in contemporary society. To be clear, by quoting Marx I am not inferring that Carla would subscribe to Marxist theory as a whole — actually she might not subscribe to it at all. However, the description she offers of her relation to her previous jobs relates to Marx's (2007:72) de-

scription of workers who have no chance but to subject themselves to their proletarian condition:

His (*sic*) labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced labor*. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labor is shunned like the plague. External labor, labor in which man alienates himself (*sic*), is a labor of self-sacrifice, of mortification" (emphasis in the original).

Second, this feeling regarding certain jobs was not merely a political disapproval of the purpose of the companies she was working for. The crowd funding community will at hand, in a more Marxist tone, could be translated as the political claim to assert the ends of production. This disapproval of work as it is relates, for Carla, to a very personal urge to stop investing her most valuable and integral assets in something she did not believe in: her efforts, her time, her energy and focus. As she told me: "I felt there was something missing, I could be contributing in other ways to project development, to innovation... to innovate with positive impact."

In opposition to the Marxist conception of the proletarian, she felt she had other options: similar to Felipe, she needed to go to the margins. Her strategy was to specialize in design for social impact (she now holds a Master's degree in such a field) and to try to engage with projects more focused on the city, on urban spaces close to her. Now she works in the strategic innovation market, having experience at consultancies focused on a positive impact on society. Other interviewees also opted for working for this kind of

company: usually they are small to middle sized offices, they hold multinationals such as Coca-Cola, Nestlé and Petrobras in their portfolio, but at the same time they value and develop projects for NGOs, civic activism and for the public sector. From time to time these small companies also have their own projects, that might become spin offs — that was the case of Catarse, for example.

Brittany is an American woman and in the interview she mentioned the choices she felt were available to her after graduating:

It's interesting to be able to create projects instead of just typing on a keyboard, and those were the kind of job opportunities I had: doing more office work for any organizations that were not particularly exciting as well. At that time too it was so competitive that I think I would have ended up having to be more focused on something with a better paycheck and not necessarily a job that is fun.

In other words, she felt that all the traditional job opportunities were uninteresting, bureaucratic and limiting her creative and her hands-on impulse. She is very concerned about natural resources, climate change and the environment in general. At the same time, however, she did not want to work either for the government nor for NGOs: "I don't have anything against the government, but I'm just more personally interested in private industry." Therefore, she joined a private park, a nature reserve, in a position in which she could start and manage projects instead of doing office and paper work. Her choice for a private environment was deliberate:

I consider myself an eco-capitalist. I've never really imagined myself working for the government or NGOs. I am more interested in doing change through the private industry. Private industry is not restrained by borders as long as you have the right market incentives.

She believes that there is a higher chance of promoting substantial changes in the world from a private institution, with no borders -- but she reinforces that the right incentives should be set by the public sector. Still she believes that federal government might be too big to understand her reality and make the right moves:

There are so many stupidities sometimes, because you have to deal with someone who will deliberate on an environmental project and they are 300 kilometers away, and they have no idea about what your reality is actually like. I do not think this is the most effective to do environmental policy. That is why it is nice to work on a private reserve because we have a relationship with the [local] public government, we are bordering a state park. I have a bit more liberty. We work a lot with the people from here. We do not have to deal with people who have never been in the area and do not know anything about it.

To differing degrees, what Carla and Brittany are claiming is that they want to be able to choose what kind of projects and action they enable in their everyday life — they want to be in control of the anew which emerges from their actions. Also, this claim is sustained by a world view that considers governments and corporations too big to feel what individuals really face in their daily routines. If Brittany's example is clearer (she even mentioned the *think global, act local* motto during the interview), Carla's one might need further discussion: in spite of the multinational clients, all of the projects and deeds she mentions in the interview are related to the urban space and civic projects she has been involved with. The consultancy she works for might not be exclusively focused on these kinds of projects but she considers that since there is room for them, it makes the job more attractive than the other ones she had had in the past.

These two women are somehow referencing the private sphere because they believe society needs change — it appears that Carla is arguing that what is needed is some positive impact in the world, while it appears that Brittany is arguing that the world is compromised due to climate change and other eminent environmental situations. Underlying these arguments is the responsibility that the state bears in such scenarios. For Brittany, part of the problem is the distance between the governments in charge and the reality of the governed people. Carla has not been explicit in supporting this view, but her actions seem to corroborate it. During the interview she was listing some probable causes for the lack of social impact in many projects. At this point she ended up saying that "it cannot be a single NGO, it is not Greenpeace that is going to sort that out, it is not the UN alone that is going to do it. It really has to be something massive" — this quote might be intriguing since Greenpeace and UN are massive institutions after all. To avoid any doubt, she expanded on this:

I think it [the solution] should be decentralized. That is part of Box's Brazilian Dream Project, the idea of microrevolutions, but the thing is that companies should also be decentralized. Thus when I say "something big" it is something that belongs to the people, that is part of everyone's concerns. Therefore, not only people, but companies need to have an active role for a better society.²³

If this quote sounds too abstract or utopian, Carla offered as an example the case of public bikes in São Paulo. In a similar scheme to Barclay's bikes in London, the scheme was structured through a public-private partnership, coincidentally backed by a nationwide bank too, a Brazilian bank, Itaú:

[Take the case of] Itaú's bikes: there are various issues that could be risen, a lot of questioning on whether it was more about marketing than about a proper solution [for public transportation]. But this was a social innovation to the city because it was considered within a mobility and civic movement [...] People who were not using bicycles before are trying it now. Despite the [commercial] interests (because I do not believe they [Itaú] are just being nice, they are a bank) it is a social innovation.

Hence, from Carla's point of view there is an important factor which is being close to people, to civic activism. Or in other words, being local — something that overarching federal governments and multinational corporations fail to achieve, as many of my informants have asserted. They appear to be arguing that at the end of the day these massive institutions would become the *system*, a black box in which money and power is the only possible rule — picturing the context in consonance with Wolin (2004), for example. In sum, the problem does not reside within the private or public realm *per se*, but in the distance between individual and institution.

To add another example, Noah is a graduate student in political theory, also from the USA. Throughout his life he has been involved with civic activism and he has also contributed to some crowd funding campaigns. He told me about one of the projects he has been involved in, one in which his group was very close to the city council:

The objective of the organization I volunteered at was at the city level and we ended up getting a majority progressive city council. [...] The city runs the airport and they decided that they were going to renegotiate the contracts for the food in the airport. They did not want to have corporate restaurants. They wanted to reach out to all very famous local businesses, restaurants and say "would you like a branch in the airport?" [...] That was sort of one policy they want but the point I am trying to make is that I am always focused on

building power at the local level, in the face of structures that are configuring the social relations at a larger scale. International trade treaties and national immigration policy [for example], these are all things that are sort of structural, but we were coming up with local ways to resist. Sort of asserting local power in the face of this larger structure.

The critique built by these people who at a certain point have resorted to crowd funding is not targeting explicitly the public or the private sphere, as Noah's example clarifies. They are at the same time targeting a specific world view that puts individuals as dependent of a paternalist institutionalism led by government and corporations. However, instead of fighting these issues with an overarching argument of more regulation nation-wide, for example, they prefer to opt-out, and push local changes so more people opt-out, of national or multinational corporations, as well as from policies that weaken local people. This focus on the local level and on local action has pushed many of them away from the ballot itself. The same rationale that makes them refuse to work for or support these corporations also makes them be completely uninterested in voting, for example. Most of my Brazilian interviewees — where voting is compulsory — have declined to vote for years.

Stephen is an experienced British entrepreneur who mentors many social entrepreneurs. He points out that due to the economic crisis there are no jobs being created, therefore "being self-employed for an increasingly greater proportion of the population is the only option." In this scenario he sees crowd funding as a promising alternative since in many cases not even banks would fund certain entrepreneurs such as people in debt,

people with no guarantees, as he would put it. But in opposition to most business men who praise the success of new companies such as Uber or Airbnb, he is quite critical about them. He made his point during the interview with an example of a British short-term car rental:

It started as Street Car which was a UK company, which is cool. Nice service, nice cars. It was bought by Zipcar, which is an American company. The service went down a bit, the cars went a bit crappier. And it is now owned by Avis [...] It is very hard because clearly it is having an impact. It does take a lot of cars off to the road. But on the other hand, it is now part of a big corporation. And it is working for shareholders rather than to the communities. And I think a lot of this stuff, for me it would be much more interesting if somehow you could keep it at a local level, a community level. But you cannot do that [...] The biggest obstacle is how you rethink money or if you can you rethink money — and if you cannot then actually everything is all a bit meaningless because it all comes down to cash in the end.

He is not precise in pointing out how to make and keep innovation local, but he is very sharp in his disapproval of global corporations taking over local business. If the critique does not target the public or the private specifically, it suggests that both spheres nowadays are driven by money. It would appear that my interviewees are claiming that corporations and government are distant from people's needs and reality because they are organized in a way that focuses on making money and also on distributing money through a lifestyle framed by the *system* -- that is to say, a lifestyle based on an overarching policy that values jobs, wages and benefits. The problem is that the crowd funding communities are re-signifying money and consequentially they are not settling down in a comfortable job that offers them some financial stability. Their personal views on the

world, on this system, seems more important than the values being delivered and nurtured in most national states policies and in most corporate environments.

The question these stories raise is rooted in the size of the organizations, but the core issues are *quasi* inevitable consequences projected by my interviewees: for them bigger institutions put the decision making process away from their everyday lives. Therefore, their strategy involves working in small scale institutions that enable three valuable things; conciliating personal values within their everyday life activities, being able to promote some actions with some impact, and avoiding bureaucratic and impersonal decision processes. The motto *think global, act local* seems to have a perfect fit with these ambitions: the thinking part allows them to channel their dreams and aspirations to action; the acting part is taken locally, that is to say, is more feasible and easy to put forward than more ambitious projects that would require layers of deliberation. In other words, instead of a global *workers of the world, unite!* chant, they are reaching out to their close network and starting small, with baby steps. Deliberation in general would be compromised if not handled at the personal level: when people's opinions are framed into instrumentalized and rationalized institutional processes the only rule that matters is cash — and that is the kind of value that is not appealing to this specific community.

Hence, action is of the utmost importance to them. Their idea of autonomy is to be able to act, to put ideas forward, to experiment and learn from it. This hands-on model is believed to be the best shortcut for a positive impact, for promoting and enabling change in the here and now. The impact and change expected are not to be felt immedi-

ately worldwide: their expectation is also focused on a micro sphere, their own lives and feelings. Carla herself is very clear on that point: she is not sure if Itaú's bike scheme is the best for São Paulo, also she would not oppose a totally public or a totally private initiative to compare them all later — the important point is to go into action and to get feedback at the local level:

It is very difficult to get it right the first time, thus we have to test, to hack, to experiment. I praise the initiatives with that mindset. And actually that is why I really like crowd funding. Crowd funding is a way to engage, to motivate, to show possible futures — that is what really matters.

All the quotes so far are somehow critical about corporations and governments: Carla had to cherry-pick consultancies to work for (and maybe with which clients to work with) because there is a discomfort with the kind of project most corporations invest in. Brittany also cherry-picked, but she was harsher on the government side — characterized as inefficient (distant from the real everyday life of people) and limited (by national borders). Noah seems to disavow the big players from the food industry and tries to minimize the impact these corporations have in his region by acting close to the government, to the city council. Stephen believes that the economic policies put forward by governments (policies in tune with the interests of multinational corporations) failed to provide jobs and stability for citizens; for him, even banks (a kind of corporation regulated to certain degree by governments) are failing in helping people to bootstrap their ideas. In spite of that, these people are not so distant either from governments or from

corporations: they try to hack them, to make these institutions work in a way that is more coherent with their aspirations. The next section discusses strategies that can be seen as attempts at a greater step: for some people, hacking these incumbent institutions is not enough and the idea is to bypass them.

5.2. From avoidance to autonomy

As the previous section described, there is a clear and intentional will to find alternative ways of making a living within the crowd funding community, a way that would circumvent the corporative and public sectors. Even if this holds true for all of my interviewees, there is a group within them that take this disavowal of these institutions further. At this point it is worth referring to Stephen's consideration of the job market. In fact, his argument follows some general trends: for example, self-employment rates have been rising slightly in the UK since 2002 while unemployment rates increased by 50% in the same period (OECD 2013).²⁴ However, the feeling that there are no jobs out there is not the only reason underneath the disavowal for these institutions. There are also clues suggesting that for them framing their professional activity in the form of a formal organization — whether it is a corporation or NGO — is not the best way to actually do what they are willing to do. Pedro told me about a time when he was one of the founders of a kind of hacker space in Brazil:

We were drafting a statute, a charter and then we realized that it would be impossible to start an organization because we could not agree on a common text. We had principles, we were heading to the same direction, we liked each other, and we used to get together. But it would not work to frame an organization with a charter, a social statute saying what we would be doing. Some would like to do journalism, some were willing to do photography... whatever, we do not need a statute, right? Instead of an organization, an NGO we ended up with a space where everybody could work on their own stuff together.

In contrast to Stephen, Pedro does not actually expect that any institution will provide the best framework for his and his friends' professional affairs. In his opinion, formalizing an organization would mean an onus without a bonus: they do not want to be limited by any regulation about what kind of professional activities they are supposed to run,²⁵ they do not want to pay taxes for opening an organization because they do not feel they are getting anything in return except boundaries. In sum, they feel better acting on their own.

From Stephen and Pedro, it is possible to grasp the skeptical tone of the disavowal of corporations, NGOs and the public sector: while many of the quotes from the previous section illustrated life choices in terms of better or worst organizations to work with, there are cases in which the disbelief is so bold that it actually pulls people to a kind of libertarian attitude. While Carla and Brittany are satisfied in the kind of projects and institutional arrangements surrounding their professional activities, other interviewees expressed a harsher opinion regarding the incumbent institutions discussed here. For Stephen, in an almost non-existent job market one probably would have little chance to be

able to choose a job that has a good fit with one's life purposes. At the same time it would appear that Pedro would probably see Brittany's choices as limiting because a lot of money, time and effort is wasted in taxes and bureaucracy to keep the company running — a lot of assets that would be best invested directly on environmental issues, for example, especially when it comes to the private market, as Pedro highlighted:

The problem is that companies will always meddle, you cannot do things your way. Thus, if you want a project to be independent, there is no way [to work with corporations behind you]. Take the classic journalism example, the chitchat that just adding the logo to something would not interfere with the content. That's tough to believe in.

In such a scenario crowd funding thrives as an alternative, a way to bootstrap projects without ties to any corporative or governmental funding. Actually, this is what Miguel, a co-founder of one of the biggest Brazilian crowd funding platforms, told me:

Indeed, we have opened an alternative model of funding in Brazil, an alternative to public funding, private funding, bank loans... And then we started to see projects flourishing, things happening. It opened a whole new world for people. [...] And in fact, this was something that did not exist before: back then there was no way to fund a project, a small project, here in Brazil.

This last part of this chapter explored how this avoidance of institutions is forged from a very similar idea of autonomy as discussed earlier. Autonomy might be clearer in Pedro's arguably idealistic quotes, but even from Stephen's more pragmatic standpoint autonomy is present: one would not depend on corporations offering jobs to make a living. More importantly, for some of them a kind of real autonomy is impossible

within the current incumbent institutions -- that is literally Pedro's position, for example.

Maria is a Romanian woman who partially funded her Master's degree through crowd funding. Amanda is a Brazilian entrepreneur who runs some open journalism workshops, mainly in poor neighborhoods around metropolitan areas. At a certain point both of them faced the possibility of partnering with some of these institutions the crowd funding community seems to disavow. Maria was approved in a kind of dream school for her, but she could not afford the tuition fees. Amanda was running a very successful communication project in one of the poorest areas of São Paulo, but she was not satisfied with the mindset of the NGO behind her. Both dismissed the most standard choices presented to them: Maria had not considered a bank loan, and Amanda pushed to leave the NGO, which meant the end of the project. Respectively, they told me their stories:

I did not want to kind of play the rules of the system just to get to a very alternative education institution. This is ridiculous. And even if I could get a loan from the bank would I really want a loan from the bank to go and study alternative education, like new economy? This is ridiculous (Maria).

We realized that it would not work with the NGO because the NGO refused to pay the boys (*sic*). We were like "we have to start something that can afford to pay the boys, so they can be autonomous" — we ought to do that because that is what we believe in. We believe that it is worth it to engage the boys if it is cool for them and if it pays them back. Otherwise they will look for a job from which they can make a living of and they would not realize that this [communication] is what they really would like to do (Amanda).

Those quotes might raise an interesting tension: one might see Maria's option as a subtle way to refuse money and its possible benefits, while on the other hand Aman-

da's opinion would be the opposite; an explicit movement in the sense of vouching money in a protagonist role. It is worth it highlighting that both women are actually pointing in the same direction when it comes to rejecting the current mindset behind incumbent institutions. Maria does not want to get involved with banks (arguably corporations with strong ties to governmental affairs such as the federal reserve and interest policies). Amanda does not believe that more traditional social projects are worth it: charity, government benefits and non-profit organizations are not actually causing impact because they do not foster autonomy.

This apparent paradoxical approach to money however, can be analyzed thoroughly in order to clarify that even if they seem to be pointing in different directions, they do share some common ground: first of all, as discussed in the previous chapter, money is mostly a social relationship marker, not merely an amoral token for exchange and the accumulation of value; second, at the core of their decision is an emphasis on how one can enjoy autonomy and root their own relationship with the world in an autonomous way. Let's get back to Maria's case as her story might not be as straightforward as Amanda's. Maria told me that after her Bachelor's degree she was working as a volunteer in some projects:

I was a bit disillusioned seeing that when you are offering your services in terms of volunteering it is a fine line between being exploited and being helpful. I felt I was being exploited because I was not getting the learning [...] but I had very good exchanges. I think it just brings the idea of skills and exchange and how we measure that. It's very subjective from person to person to think about what each one thinks is fair to invest and give back in this exchange -- and here

money is not involved. For me it was an interesting question that was posed there.

From thoughts like that it is clear that Maria was already calling into question how problematic exchanges are, in her case how uncomfortable she felt trading her skills for money or for anything else. However, the problem, as she told me, was not put on the exchange *per se* but in the context. For instance, as a photographer and journalist crowd funding her tuition fees, her first thought was to offer a big book with photos taken by herself and stories she would write about everyone who pledged for her campaign. That was too much work for a short deadline, so she took an even more personal route: "for example a photograph, or you would get one of my essays or my dissertation, a song, maybe photography services if you were a big company" — that was what she went for in terms of perks for her crowd funding contributors. She was telling a story and sharing her experience with her supporters -- and the exchange was a platform for that. In other words, she felt she was moving away from a kind of pecuniary exchange that would be meaningless from her point of view, and at the same time she was embracing a more personal or social lens to comprehend and forge these exchanges:

I was trying to stay out of politics and economy, I just did not want to have anything to do with it in any way. It was kind of putting it all in a "bad guys box" and do not want to deal with it. I went through the other, alternative route, local villages and what is happening out there — that is not mainstream. I was very curious to see what is happening and what is the drive for these people to really go off the grid. Is this really possible? Because this sounded like utopia for me back then. So, I just wanted to experience it myself and also I wanted to see if I could ever live or make my own alternative way of being.

At this point she was framing a series of very personal ways to comprehend life choices around her and clearly there is a stereotyped standard career path, a standard way to make a living that was not interesting for her. At the same time this is the mainstream in her standpoint, thus one would have to be willing to fight the temptation to go with the flow. In that sense her life choice was to start to trace her own path outside this trail. For her the possibility of making this diversion, the possibility of creating her own route, is a gesture of autonomy. Thus, when facing the tuition fees invoice Maria opted for the arguably riskier path: not asking for a loan in a bank but for friends, and friends of friends and so on. Not messing up with the "bad guys" was not only a possibility but -- most importantly -- the option she actually chose because this way granted enough autonomy for her.

Looking back to Amanda's story — specifically when she expanded the idea of autonomy to her "boys," to the teenagers that participated in the social and entrepreneurial activities she hosted -- the context was a completely different one. Two main points must be highlighted here: they were poor in a very unequal country and they were young. According to Amanda they were already dealing with a lot of social and peer pressure: maybe they were considering dropping out of school to try to find a (probably unskilled) job and contribute to the family budget; maybe some of their friends were getting well off working for drug dealers or gathering in gangs, which would make these real possibilities for her teenagers in the short term; maybe they have not even considered that journalism was for them at the first place. As in Bourdieu's (1990) classical argument on repro-

duction: the weight of classes and personal trajectories is not only a matter of privileges and constraints, it is also a way of forging what one considers conceivable for the future.

In Amanda's interview the context in which the teenagers are considered is made clear in lines such as:

In general the boys are not going to school, most of them are high school dropouts. And when we asked 'where are they?' we realized they were on the internet. And then we asked again 'and where do they learn things?' just in time to realize it was with tutorials on YouTube about mathematics, about makeup, whatever. Then we spent about 6 months working on the language and the blah blah blah to launch educational videos. [...] We had no money to do it, thus we ended up in Catarse, we need to open the videos for everyone, free access to everybody: these educational videos had to be free because we were thinking about high school teens, they have no money.

In other words, Amanda felt money was important for them to be autonomous and escape the kind of mainstream within their social context. Arguably, if the project could support them with some money they would be more confident in considering communication as a career option -- and with this confidence they are better empowered, they have a higher degree of autonomy. Once more, money is understood in a very peculiar social context, playing a very important role in negotiating with power structures (e.g. peer pressure, repression, etc.). Finally, Amanda also believes that their autonomy has to do with her own autonomy: "their autonomy sets me free to be the mother of my daughter, otherwise I would end up full of other children to take care of -- I only can look after myself if they are autonomous."

This is a very common characteristic among my interviewees: their own purpose in life. Amanda loves her job, the projects she runs. But she loves being a mother and she sees those projects as a way to make it possible for her to be a good mother. It is not about a worldwide revolt against corporations, NGOs and governments, but the opposite; a set of choices based on micro inwards revolutions; a set of choices that at the end of the day offers them the feeling they are more capable of being autonomous than they would be in a full-time job in an organization, for example; a set of choices that also empowers them to get involved in different projects making a living out of the multitude of them, not of a single one; a set of choices that connects these projects with their utmost personal ambitions in life.

Another of my interviewees has co-founded a recurring crowd funding platform in Brazil in which (by the date of the interview) he has five different projects. He was the person who coded the platform from scratch, but most of the projects are related to his career as musician and as a tango dancer and teacher. However, there is another project he hosts there: as the platform charges no fees at all it is supported by a crowd funding campaign within the platform itself. It is interesting to take into account the importance he puts on these options:

I got tired of this chip chatting about changing the world. So why is this platform so cherished for me? [...] Because I dream of a world in which we do not put price on things, a world in which we do not create services just for the sake of creating it, just to put up with the financial situation. So all that has to do with a will that other people could do what I am doing. To change their life as I am changing mine, in baby steps.

For him this idea has matured with time. A couple of years ago he was a partner in a more traditional tech startup. He told me the history behind one of the most successful products they developed there, a mailing platform: "the idea was making a lot of money, so we would have money to do cool stuff -- that was what we had in mind." They actually achieved it somehow: the company became successful in the market. However, as the company grew bigger, more demanding clients and projects ended up consuming all his time -- and little was left for the cool stuff, for music and tango, for social impact projects, for working in projects that would change their lives and help other people change theirs too.

As mentioned earlier, making money is not the exact issue they are addressing. The real problem is finding ways to support — financial support included — their dream projects. The interesting part is that in spite of this kind of idealistic world view, they are very pragmatic -- many interviewees used different words such as "I work with the hands-on imperative in mind, I cannot waste my time in endless discussions, this is for those who have time to waste," as Pedro once told me, or "I am not a good bullshitter, I kind of like doing stuff," as Stephen described himself. Sometimes the common sense might say people work for money, but in their case, they seem to make money in order to work -- in order to be autonomous and work with things they really believe in.

In that scenario crowd funding is a proxy for autonomy for many of my respondents: they do not depend on corporations, the job market or the government to bootstrap and run their projects; therefore, they feel completely empowered to choose what to

work with and who to work with. In the process they also reinforce their distance from incumbent institutions, feeling that the proximity to their peers is also an interesting asset -- being close to, and exchanging with partners in the projects, people with whom they exchange skills, supporters of their crowd funding campaigns etc. is a way to make the money (and other kind of valuable resources) available. And this movement, by empowering them and by doing it without the incumbent institutions, makes the rejection of government and corporations even bolder. For example, that's what Miguel takes into account:

[In traditional funding] the intermediaries in the process keep a significant percentage. If it's a publisher the author gets 10% and they get 90%. So, one gets that crowd funding is a possibility to be directly connected to one's fan base — and in the end of the day the publisher would end up selling to exactly the same people, to the fans of that author. [...] That is true also when it comes to laws that foster cultural investments from the private sphere: the gatekeepers are corporations [...] and they gain a lot of decision power, they support mainly celebrities' projects, people that already have a great amount of social capital.

Crowd funding then is a way to create and reinforce networks of people with something in common, and within these networks, amongst people with similar objectives in life and similar world views, my interviewees feel more empowered, more autonomous. Growing big is usually seen as a risk to autonomy -- usually it is perceived a way of losing track of profits (as Miguel just said) and of decision making:

It has to be if not super local, at least national because of the legals around financial things. I think there is no doubt that crowd funding platforms have to be local. It's all about reach and that is why Kickstarter is the gorilla in the field: because they have got the reach. Indigogo does quite a good job too. Crowd Cube have built up some [in the UK] and I think that is good, but I think this is the real

challenge.

Finally, the matter of the scale of their operations is yet another argument to distance themselves from governments and corporations. For some of the people I interviewed it does not matter what are the motivations and purposes behind governors and CEOs: keeping close to people you depend on is a way to assure autonomy -- and usually they see that these organizations lose it when they scale up.

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Throughout this chapter dissonant points of view were put together to describe how the crowd funding community forges their own version of autonomy. For Pedro, autonomy "is what really matters, that is it: autonomy, a more autonomous and critical individual" -- and indeed this is very representative of my data collection. In a more descriptive approach they have their own version of autonomy that is not a standard career path with a good salary, benefits and social security. Their version emphasizes the freedom to choose where to invest their times and skills — and referring to Berlin's typology of freedom, this *freedom to* choose has a strong tie with the *freedom from* interference in these choices. Actually, their version of autonomy is kind of sloppy when it comes to the *freedom from*. They usually emphasize how their own choices (in a microsociological sphere) guarantee the avoidance of external interference, but sometimes they are negligent with the social context (in a macrosociological sphere) that might be even more relevant for such freedom: as discussed in the previous chapter, they enjoy a series of privileges

from their family and educational backgrounds, as well as from their own skills — this seems to make it easier for them to focus on the *freedom to* and be more negligent with the *freedom from* idea.

From a more analytical approach it is clear that this approach to autonomy puts crowd funding away from a purely technological arrangement and reinforces the political side of it. When Pedro reinforced that autonomy is what matters, he complemented his idea, describing how this was politically engaging people -- according to his own words, politics is not only about political candidates, parties, elections and government: "it is about a wider comprehension about what you do as political. It is a political instrument, it is the politicization of the individual." According to him this was a way to hack society in the sense of making current institutions work for you and not the other way around. A more formal way to put that is saying that this is a political statement against the amount of power held by incumbent institutions and -- more importantly -- against the valuation processes fostered by these institutions. The critique covers the institutional impact in the everyday life of most citizens: arguments that ultimately are related to the alienation of social relations in money (as discussed in the previous chapter), and the disavowal for the way private affairs are tangled up in the public sphere (for example as in Arendt 1998 and Wolin 2005 aforementioned).²⁶

Furthermore, crowd funding is not a unanimous route for autonomy and surely not a unanimous political expression. Pedro himself finds it quite time and energy consuming to run a successful crowd funding campaign (and he has run a couple of them)

and mostly this is the last resort for him. Also, Stephen is quite critical about the buzz around crowd funding:

Technology is nothing in crowd funding. It is all about marketing and reach. [...] It is this kind of a Dragons' Den syndrome where everybody thinks they are an entrepreneur, everybody thinks they are an investor -- which is good, which is clearly what produces the volume, the critical mass. But have you ever tried to get any stats out of any crowd funding platforms?²⁷

The question raised here is basically a critique towards the accountability of crowd funding projects -- as Stephen comes from the venture capital market he feels like sometimes project creators are mostly black boxes: one does not always know what is actually done with surplus money (when a campaign raises more money than it asked for), and he would argue it is basically a subjective and optional practice to share reports about how the money was in fact employed, or even reports about the impact and success of projects. For others, these questions do not matter at all: this would be just a vestige of a corporative and market mindset in which pricing things is more important than vouching for people and ideas.

In spite of this divergence the political tone of this idea of autonomy is valuable from a sociological point of view: in the light of the way everyday life choices are relevant to the triumph of autonomy — especially when it comes to an anti-growth attitude -- it represents a microsociological version of the macrosociological political ecology stream. Wolin's (2004:604-5) appealing considerations about this topic are coherent to my interviewees world view:

What the economic polity renders scarce for its citizens is the direct experience of politics itself and the responsibilities of power. And that is the "renewable resource" unique to the political ecology of localism: unlike the corporation and its accomplice [...] localism can generate and continuously renew direct political experience. [...] The aim is not to level in the name of equality or to cherish nostalgia, but, by gaining some measure of control over coordinations and decisions intimately affecting the everyday lives of ordinary citizens, to relieve serious and remediable distress and to extend inclusion beyond the enjoyment of equal civil rights.

Surely this idea of political engagement "beyond the enjoyment of equal civil rights" — or any kind of more abstract political right — is what is at stake when the crowd funding community describes itself as pragmatic, as a group of hands on people; also it is what is at stake when Pedro says that individuals ought to be more autonomous and broaden the perception of what is it to be political; or what is at stake when Arendt (1973) criticizes representative democracies in the sense they reserved the possibility of acting politically for very specific moments every other year in the voting cabinet. Being able to engage in action, and not only in work or labor, is the way Arendt believed it was possible to be truly political, the way to reinforce human plurality (1998).

However, it is compulsory to question if this kind of action afforded by the crowd funding community is indeed a new possibility in terms of political action. The following chapter on politics focuses on that topic but for now it is prudent to explore how this action emerged from the idea of autonomy and how particular traces of this autonomy render interesting questions in terms of political theory. The strategy crowd funding traced to avoid incumbent institutions has the interesting side effect of grouping peo-

ple together around common interests -- and actually these social ties are protagonists in granting autonomy for people within this group. Interestingly, this arrangement tends to eliminate debate, to eliminate conflict as people are grouped by common interest. This may illustrate what Mouffe (2005:3) labels as highly antipolitical:

Instead of trying to design the institution which, through supposedly "impartial" procedures, would reconcile all conflicting interests and values, the task for democratic theorists and politicians should be to envisage the creation of a vibrant "agonistic" public sphere of contestation where different hegemonic political projects can be confronted.

This emphasis on confrontation is absent in the orchestration of autonomy described here. *Grosso modo*, anything goes since a project creator can gather around his idea a bunch of people interested in the same principles. And again this is another red light for scholars of antipolitical trends in modern societies: politics "must be able to impose internal constraints on its members" according to Schedler (1997:8).

Therefore, in spite of all the political significance of the attitudes and life styles embraced by crowd funding communities there are unresolved issues when it comes to advancing the comprehension of these behaviors as political. On an ideological level they are clearly confronting the power of incumbent institutions, the power of the system, as they say. And that is already meaningful enough to characterize the group as a bearer of substantial political voice. In addition, they do not act merely as an opposition that offers no alternative way out of the mainstream: in fact they are very resourceful in hacking the *status quo* and in paving the way to new social arrangements -- that is precisely what they

are doing when they re-signify money and promote their take on autonomy. However, their disavowal for political institutions might be a hiatus in their attempt to enhance the possibilities of politics in contemporary societies:

The term "antipolitics", however, should not be misconstrued as a synonym for mere opposition to particular regimes or confused with electoral opposition that arises in the normal course of contemporary democratic or quasidemocratic practices, as Andreas Schedler points out [...] ²⁸ Antipolitics is present when politics itself is regarded with cynicism but also seen as a contaminant of society, indeed the enemy of all other societal activity. When antipolitics flourishes, politics itself becomes the central target of opposition and is perceived in extremis as unnecessary, the potential destroyer of all that is praiseworthy in human affairs. Antipolitics in this sense inverts Hobbes's analysis: whereas he argues that politics is the precondition for civil and humane conduct, the antipolitical actor or theoretician maintains that politics is a threat to morality, enterprise and all authentically human values (Jaffe 1997:62).

The next chapter, *A new realm to empower action*, will go further in exploring the way crowd funding can be read as political, directing linking it back to Arendt's concept of action and the possibility of the anew. Next, the following chapter, *Isolation, silence and absence*, offers a critique that reiterates this discussion about the antipolitical aspect of this community and frames it in a more analytical context of political theory.

6. A new realm to empower action

In all of us there is a dimension of obligation, constraint, necessity or compulsion which is external, and there is also a share of freedom, of creativity which Hannah Arendt places under the label of action (Caillé 2009:112).

In the last chapters, I drew on Arendt's ideas about human action in order to explore the everyday decisions of my interview informants. Also, in the previous chapters the focus was on introducing readers to the world views I discovered during my data collection. Now that we share a common knowledge about how the crowd funding community see themselves within the world it is the role of this chapter to start shifting the attention to those overarching theoretical claims — that is to say, to better delineate the ground on which it makes sense to refer to Arendt when it comes to analyzing crowd funding and politics. The purpose of this and the following chapter is to analyze and scrutinize the claims and limitations of the responses of my informants.

That said, discussing politics through Arendt's lens is *per se* a specific analytical standpoint. The first part of this chapter discusses the boundaries inherent in this theoretical choice as well as the relevance of such a perspective for the thesis. Next, the purpose of the second part of the chapter is to discuss the world view of the crowd funding community in relation to this theoretical background. In other words, to explore how the will to trace their own marginal path, the will to escape incumbent institutions demonstrated by my interviewees, can be understood as a political gesture. In addition, this last part of the

chapter discusses questions such as the extent of the impact put forward by this political gesture, and how they relate to the ideas of common good and to the public sphere.

Arendt's oeuvre discusses politics from different standpoints — right from her first major work on totalitarianism (1951) to her later writings on the French and the American revolutions (1973). Her books and essays are also in-depth analyses of central events of her time such as the Holocaust and the Eichmann judgement in Israel (a former Nazi official brought to the courts after the Second World War). These texts raised important critiques to contemporary political theory, especially when it comes to the idea of a public realm and to a republican take on of modernity during the mid-twentieth century:

Arendt's thesis that political freedom can only exist in a limited space seems to mark a radical break with the liberal-democratic tradition and with its universalism of human and civil rights. [...] She takes it to be a human (that is, moral) right to have civil or citizens' rights. However, in contrast to the liberal tradition, Arendt considers such rights not as the *substance*, but only as a necessary *precondition* of political freedom. According to her, it is a *fateful error* to confuse the constitutionally based guarantee of basic civil rights with the constitution of political freedom (Wellmer 2000:223, emphasis in original).

In such terms her political theory focused mostly on the critique of the idea of representative democracy, arguing in favor of a more participative engagement in the public sphere. In other words, she claims that representative democracy has failed to offer an ongoing precondition of participation, offering instead the right to participate every other year in the ballot box (1973). Critiques raised towards Arendt's theory usually call into question the importance she gave to that argument while leaving aside other factors that

arguably would be more relevant in terms of political science and philosophy.

For instance, Mouffe (2005:9) pondered that "some theorists such as Hannah Arendt envisage the political as a space of freedom and public deliberation, while others see it as a space of power, conflict and antagonism." This critique frames Arendt's theory as optimistic and naïve when it comes to the public sphere, but this is a simplification of her work. Arendt's argument is Aristotelian in the sense that, according to her, a virtuous life of free and unique citizens would lead to a participation in the public arena -- this participation would be *per se* considering the origin of the democracy. It is comprehensible to consider that such a scenario might nurture an imaginary of politics as an organized precondition in which very polite actors employ well-versed rhetoric to stand up for what they believe in. In spite of that, this might not be the case; maybe the virtue of engaging in the public sphere has not come with neat debates as a requirement.²⁹ Either way the point is that the climate of such an arena was not Arendt's focus on discussing the political: instead of focusing on the tensions at stake while citizens act in public, her oeuvre focuses on what led (or should have lead) citizens into the public arena. Her political theory in that sense is mostly introspective in relation to the citizens themselves and not predictive of how the public space should look.

Other scholars such as Wolin (1983, 2004) would probably agree with Arendt (1973, 1998) on the statement that modern states have basically malfunctioned because what was supposed to be a public arena has become entangled with too many private interests. In fact, both scholars claim that the modern state functions as a massive corpora-

tion: for Arendt modernity has delegated the political realm to the background in favor of an inflated social realm — that is to say, states are mostly worried about provisioning for a social security system and keeping up with economic indexes (as yet, modern states are not focusing on securing ways to bring human pluralism to the foreground). For Wolin the power that multinational corporations have achieved in the last decades seconds them to a political power that has entangled them into government themselves. In both scenarios a specific logic would be in place, namely the way the market mindset sets the bar for reproducing the means of human existence. However, while Arendt considers human pluralism the exceptional characteristic that would justify the engagement in public life, Wolin has a different approach as to why people should care about it:

For historically, democracy has been the means by which the many have sought access to political power in the hope that it could be used to redress their economic and social lot. The "natural" state of society contains important distinction of wealth, birth, and education that are typically extended into political power. Thus, social power is translated into political power which is then used to increase social power. Democracy is the attempt of the many to reverse the natural cycle of power, to translate social weakness into political power in order to alleviate the consequences of what is not so much their condition as their lottery (Wolin 1983:3).

Once more, Arendt's introspective take on political theory creates a certain dissonance. Following Wolin's thoughts, democracy would have a certain teleology that is absent in her reflections on what would be the motives to assemble in public. Wolin's citizens are probably better depicted as activists with an agenda bringing them together as a group, while Arendt's citizens are forged from a radical philosophical understanding of

the uniqueness of each human being.

Definitively, the point here is not a matter of standing up for one or another scholar. The purpose of this debate is to take those critiques into account in order to better delineate the purpose of referring to Arendt for this analysis. The ideas of public, social and private interests are not clear-cut throughout my interviewees' reflections. On the one hand, crowd funding communities are not typical entrepreneurs looking for funding to bootstrap their unicorn startup. On the other hand, neither are they typical political parties or social movements fighting for a political agenda. In fact, people creating and pledging in these online campaigns might have a lot in common, political agenda included, however, most of them would not say they are acting politically. At maximum some of them could entertain this idea of being political after being asked about it but even then they would not see themselves as actors in a public space built for political debates. Their perception about what they are doing when engaging in a multitude of proposals hosted in crowd funding platforms is definitively not linked to more traditional institutions such as a political party or a social movement.

6.1. The failed attempt of incumbent institutions joining crowd funding

At this point it is worth noting two possible dissonances. First, crowd funding

is not a new mechanism and political parties as well as social movements have already used some of these platforms for fundraising. In Brazil, for instance, eminent leaders of the Labor Party once sentenced by the Supreme Court to pay high fines launched three crowd funding campaigns, one per person, to raise money to cover these penalties. Some of them were actually millionaires and, not necessarily related to this fact, the crimes they were sentenced for included corruption and money laundering. A judge from the Supreme Court called into question the initiative, claiming that according to the Brazilian Constitution a felon could not outsource his penalty, even using an analogy that no one can serve at the prison on the behalf of the felon. He also reacted with sarcasm in a letter to a senator from the Labor Party inviting them to launch a crowd funding campaign to refund the public treasury for the diversion of the funds they were sentenced for. In spite of his rants and in spite of some public dissatisfaction (especially from people not sympathetic to left wing politics) no further action was taken (Gazeta do Povo 2014).

Second, crowd funding is also not new for business: as mentioned by my Chinese interviewee, numerous campaigns seem to be more focused on venture capital than on anything else. Also, Victor, an interviewee from São Paulo who is a journalist focused on motor sports, commented on a crowd funding campaign Caterham launched in late 2014. Caterham was a Formula 1 team that went bankrupt before the end of that season:

At first sight it was bizarre, we have never seen that before in Formula 1. Definitely it was not something usual, a lot of people still overlook crowd funding. So our point was that they [Caterham] were running a crowd funding campaign for one purpose, which clearly was automobile racing, right? We could not see any purpose beyond

that, they would race a grand prix and that is it.

Later on, Victor adds that this purpose is way different from, as he put it, a person who wants to have their album recorded. In fact, he has not explicitly disagreed with Caterham's initiative but it was clear that Victor was not comfortable with the purpose of their crowd funding — or maybe the lack of purpose: "it was something without a purpose because it was elitist" he considered, referring to the high values a given team has to afford in order to race in Formula 1. In spite of that, as the story unfolded, many fans of Caterham, of their charismatic driver Kamui Kobayashi, and of motor sports in general, pledged on their campaign. Victor pondered that this engagement was surprising to him: he would not expect that such a capitalist venture would receive as many donations as they received. In the end the campaign succeeded in raising £2.35 million (CrowdCube 2015).

Victor pondered this:

People do not see restriction in such an initiative because as we know people and corporations need it, because global economy has changed. No one is actually giving money away in sponsorship as they did before, and the public really feels like they can support their idols, something they like.

The cases of the sentenced politicians from the Brazilian Labor Party and the case of the bankrupt Formula 1 team are possible dissonances from my interviewees' ideas as they are very specific and questionable purposes for crowd funding. In other words, that is not what people I spoke to have in mind when they first consider crowd funding. Hence, by affirming that the crowd funding community is not about market entrepreneurs or political institutions I am not denying that these approaches exist. One the one

hand, such a statement arguably overlooking these cases is a coherent interpretation of what I have heard from my interviewees. On the other hand, it is also a more interesting analytical path: as this is not a quantitative investigation it seems more valuable in terms of sociology and political theory to explore social values underlying the views from my field work that would sustain such arguments.

When it comes to the sociological consideration of crowd funding, this research needs the creation of a type of distance in order to clarify the theoretical arguments at stake. A possible beginning of that clarification is to ponder on the influence of hacker culture as a radical political critique on contemporary society — and this claim might begin on the downfall of counter culture (Palmås 2006). *The Rebel Sell* by Heath and Potter (2005) claims that the attempts by counterculture movements to "jam" capitalism have basically failed. The importance of this argument is that after the fall of socialism, counterculture has been the main stream of radical political order calling into question the *status quo* of capitalism. The most basic argument in the book is that in spite of being inspired by left wing ideas, counterculture initiatives are easily incorporated in the market logic, making them innocuous in terms of promoting social change — the cover of the book exemplifies that situation in a *quasi*-comic way: a picture of a mug with the classic Che Guevara face illustration printed on it. Even if *The Rebel Sell* is not traditional academic writing according to Palmås (2006), the diagnosis they trace has a lot of similarities with more standard scholarly arguments such as Sennett (2002) or Boltanski and Chiappello (2011), as I will discuss in the next paragraphs.

Therefore, the sort of critique raised by Victor when he called into question the purpose of a crowd funding for a Formula 1 team is a great invitation to jump into this overarching social debate. In other words, the point is that in a contemporary society in which even counterculture movements can be easily embraced by capitalism (Heath and Potter 2005), there is enough material from my interviewees to discuss how crowd funding helps them to steer away from these boundaries.

It would appear that my interviewees would agree with Boltanski and Chiapello (2011) when they sustain that even if capitalism has changed over the decades it is still a source of indignation. One of the reasons the authors mention to support this claim is that anyhow capitalism always ends up in oppression:

Capitalism as [is] a source of *oppression*, inasmuch as it is opposed to the freedom, autonomy, and creativity of the human beings who are subject, under its sway, on the one hand to the domination of the market as an impersonal force [...] and on the other hand to the forms of subordination involved in the condition of wage-labour (Boltanski and Chiapello 2011:86, emphasis in original).

First of all, as Victor pondered whether or not he was comfortable with Caterham's campaign, this tension between oppression and the mixture of freedom, autonomy and creativity was at stake, especially when he compared that campaign with a hypothetical musician trying to get his/her first album recorded. For him the Formula 1 team was just trying to keep cars on the racing track, which is fine for Victor. However, even a passionate motor sports fan such as Victor pondered that an artist trying to put his art forward, a musician trying to make money out of his personal and intimate work, was some-

how more interesting for crowd funding. Getting back to Boltanski and Chiapello (2011), this tension might be considered a under set of philosophical debates dating back to the Enlightenment:

Rooting itself in the liberal values derived from the spirit of Enlightenment, it [the social critique] denounces the falsity of an order that pretends to accomplish the modern project of liberation only the better to betray it. Far from liberating the human potentialities of autonomy, self-organization and creativity, capitalism excludes people from running their own affairs, subjects human beings to the domination of instrumental rationality, and keeps them imprisoned in an "iron cage" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2011:91).

The authors maintain that the 1968 generation, as well as the following ones offered a new take on capitalism: by valuing individual creativity and autonomy over hyper hierarchical structures, the level of oppression put forward by capitalism would be minimized. However, none of that has succeeded in making people feel freer (Boltanski and Chiapello 2011). Other authors such as Sennett (2002) hold very similar claims, downsides included:

The apostles of the new capitalism argue that their version of [...] three subjects — work, talent, consumption — adds up to more freedom in modern society [...] My quarrel with them is not whether their version of the new is real; institutions, skills, and consumption patterns have indeed changed. My argument is that these changes have not set people free (Sennett 2002:10).

In other words, maybe Victor's reluctance to match the purpose of the Formula 1 team and the purpose of the musician next door is related to the nature of what is being sustained with the fruits from the campaign in each case. Using crowd funding as

a mere fund raising mechanism for a motor sports team was not the proper perspective -- and maybe that is why he later reinforced that sports fans felt they were closer to the team by supporting them, not only from the grandstands but also with financial contributions that were crucial to keeping the team in the championship. Victor seemed to constantly remember the fact that a Formula 1 team is *per se* a millionaire investment: just a year before Caterham's crowd funding initiative, NBC Sports (2013) estimated a top Formula 1 team budget was close to half a billion dollars per season. And these recollections seemed to be pretty sharp in his judgements of whether or not crowd funding and Formula 1, in that scenario, made sense for him.

In order to conciliate and justify this tension, he employed the counterexample of the case of the musician — a classical example of someone "liberating the human potentialities of autonomy, self-organization and creativity" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2011:91, cited above) — to sort of justify why he cannot entertain this idea for long. At the same time, he reinforced changes on the individual level when it comes to the Formula 1 case: fans were finally feeling closer to the sport they used to see only on the television, fans being part of the sport through financial contributions, and financial contributions that seemed to be crucial to the continuation of Caterham in the championship.³⁰

The main difference is that in the first case, that of the Formula 1 team, nothing new is actually being created. Money is being pledged as an investment for the continuation of a corporation. The same is valid for Wei's case, the Chinese respondent I interviewed. He was disappointed after the campaign he pledged for was taken off-line at the

request of a venture capitalist that had just bought the patents of the product launched in that same crowd funding campaign. Once the real people behind the crowd funding faded out, the interest of my interviewees faded out too. Or to put it differently, once corporations begins to be protagonists in the crowd funding scene, the interest of my interviewees steered towards other directions.

Finally, the question this research addresses at this point is the reason why my data sustains this very specific credo when it comes to crowd funding. A way to see it is to go back to the attempts to oppose mainstream political and economic thought, or, in other words, to try to understand my interviewees' choices in a broader context of a sociological struggle framing tensions between the *status quo* of capitalism and the feeling of freedom enjoyed by citizens in the twentieth-first century. This disappointment within the crowd funding community can be understood in comparison to cultural changes which emerged in 1968, as mentioned previously. Palmås (2006:100) argues:

Beyond the misconceptions about the year 1968, we also have to acknowledge that the late 1960s made a lasting impact on Western culture. [...] These few years saw the baby boomer generation mounting a furious attack on authority — and this critical approach to hierarchies has stayed with us since then (Palmås 2006:100).

This impact goes beyond a mere confrontation in terms of the organizational structure of corporations and institutions in general. According to Palmås, this impact is at the core of the debate on how technology is calling into question market economies — if not technology itself. Such cultures emerged from tech groups, that is to

say, hacker culture and free and open source culture. In contrast to the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s counterculture, which was willing to jam the *modus operandi* of capitalism, the culture inaugurated with the dot com bubble in the late 1990s and is mostly dedicated to finding alternative ways in spite of capitalism. Arguably, this new positioning is only possible via a new way of seeing the world -- not as a motor to be jammed, but as a computer network to be explored (and arguably exploited):

Monopolistic, bureaucratic, disciplinary, sluggish, and slightly laughable cathedrals were increasingly challenged by self-organising and intelligent bazaars of hackers, activists or consumers. While imposing and powerful, economic power structures ought not to be described as rigid motors, but as a hackable computer networks (Palmås 2006:96).

In this quote the author refers to a famous analogy by Eric S. Raymond in his essay *The Cathedral and the Bazaar: Musings on Linux and Open Source by an Accidental Revolutionary*. This text compares top-down organizations and bottom-up communities, having Linux developers community as a sort of case study for his arguments — this text is arguably a pillar for the hacker and free and open source communities. This reference, when employed in Palmås argument, and specifically in this crowd funding sociological analysis, gives a special meaning for the apparent subjective judgement sustained by Victor and Wei, for example. What is at stake is a political claim about the same structures questioned by the 1968 generation, that is to say, an attempt to be free citizens in a free world. Following Palmås, the point is that instead of merely confronting the political strategies of previous generations such as counterculture, they have a new method to put

their political voice forward:

The children of the '99 revolution shun the [...] deconstruction methodologies that their parents invented. Instead they employ a hacker attitude towards reality, exploring new forms of activism and critique. A key point here is that the '99ers are as interested in reconstruction (of self-organised structures) as in deconstruction (of hierarchies). Drawing from organisational principles from the world of computers, they are interested in engaging in hands-on building of tangible structures (Palmås 2066:102).

In a broader perspective, the point here is that even if crowd funding has been used by incumbent institutions there are a series of caveats that should not pass unnoticed. First of all is what I have learnt directly from my interviews: their focus is on the possibility of a peer to peer relationship, so when this structure is disrupted by an uninvited institution the magic disappears for them. The importance of such a distinction, as well as the relationship of this distinction to the hacker culture, is so great that it appeared almost literally in the words of one of my interviewees.

For instance, Miguel was about to graduate from a business school, and he was entertaining the idea of starting a social entrepreneurship with a classmate. Eventually their initiative took off but during the interview he highlighted the trigger for that idea. Before quoting him it is worth providing some background information on Thiago — a person Miguel will eventually cite. Thiago ended up as another co-founder of the platform Miguel was about to bootstrap. The importance of his sudden appearance is his background: a well-versed software developer, a common face in the free and open source software community, helping people run local, national and international events within

the community. That said, this is the story Miguel told me:

A social business has to make profits, that is what keeps it positive. So, I started to study more and more about it. The startup environment was very important, we were able to meet people running [social] business online, we were finding matches [to our ideas]. At this point the startup model made a lot of sense for us. And then came Thiago. We started to discuss our ideas and Thiago brought a lot of different references, a lot of experience from open source. And that was a better match with our ideas of social business. And that was precisely when I realized crowd funding has impact over the very basic idea of funding, in a peer to peer level. That made a lot of sense, that totally shaped our ideas.

In addition, Daniel, one of the founders of the biggest Brazilian crowd funding platforms, is even clearer when it comes to the rejection of the hierarchical structures (which resonates Palmàs 2006 as well as Boltanski and Chiapello 2011). At a certain point during the interview he sustained that Catarse, the platform he founded, was mostly a community while Kickstarter was basically a business:

There is also a structural aspect. Kickstarter is a corporation with a clear-cut set of partners, a set of investors, a series of bureaucratic structures that make it compulsory for them to even have an [executive] board.

I have already discussed Daniel's impetus to action and how he feels bounded by bureaucratic structures in the previous chapter.³¹ Actually, the whole idea of autonomy explored there is a set of strategies to overcome decision making processes that seem to put people -- understood here as creative and autonomous individuals — in the background. Therefore, this world view of the crowd funding community is not merely an important part of their positioning in the world but also fits with a very specific stream

of radical political thought calling into question core incumbent institutions sustaining the market economy: namely the type of structures criticized since the 1968 social movements.

Interestingly, if this sounds like a kind of confrontational left wing and anti-capitalism or anti-corporation stunt, the crowd funding community also claims it does not have any expectation that the government is a possible alternative, opposing even regulation in most cases -- and again this is the basis of their understanding of autonomy discussed in the previous chapter. In other words, while calling capitalism into question they seem to believe in a radical sort of freedom that fits a radical right wing stunt: anti-state, anti-regulation or, to put it differently, defending every kind of negative freedom (Berlin 1999) that might thwart their strategies to make a living while doing what they believe in. If Wolin and Arendt (as mentioned in the opening of this chapter) have as their motives the justification of a blurred thin line separating the way government and corporations work nowadays, the crowd funding community seems to agree with these scholars. For my interviewees, both structures, the government and the corporation suffer from the same weakness: they are unduly bureaucratic and this bureaucracy invariably obfuscates the real people underneath these structures. To put it simply, decisions are always made following guidelines and regulations, always focused on predetermined targets (usually money and power). Individual uniqueness, creativity and autonomy are not a priority -- even when these structures try to appropriate the crowd funding mechanism.

6.2. A political realm within crowd funding

When it comes to the modern states, Arendt raises two sorts of critiques. As mentioned, first, there is a more overarching critique when she denounces the lack of a public realm — and consequentially the lack of action in a society basically functioning merely around labor and work. Second, there is a more structural critique when she claims that the possibility of action was effectively displaced to a couple of seconds when voting in a ballot box every other year (Arendt 1973). Hence understating the concept of action is crucial to a dialogue with both critiques.

Therefore, this last block of the present chapter better delineates the concept of action in order to trace parallels with the world view sustained by the crowd funding community and what Arendt expected in terms of the political realm. In spite of that, the intention is not to sustain that these parallels are the only way to sociologically comprehend the position of crowd funding communities — on the contrary: in my next chapter, I introduce a competing standpoint within this same debate. My aim is develop a framework capable of understanding tensions in a meaningful sociological perspective.

6.2.1. Creating a new public realm

First there is the complete absence of a real public realm. For Arendt (1998)

the private realm, that is to say, the space of intimacy of the household is the place for labor — a kind of activity that is focused on the most basic human needs in terms of sustainability for all of us as a race (putting bread on the table is a way to summarize it). The private realm is also the place in which we work, creating tools to make labor easier so basically our private lives comprehend labor and work in these terms. In ancient Greece there was also the public realm, an exclusive place for what she called action, or "a space for the doers of great deeds and speaker of great words" as Achilles would put it.³² Action is the only way through which human essence and uniqueness would strive for immortality — or in other words the proper realm for citizens to fight for what they believe in (instead of simply fighting to put bread on the table).

The public arena in this tradition is the place for action and, in the case of the ancient Greeks, was also the core of democracy, of the state. However, for Arendt (2005:47) this tradition is lost and nowadays modern states have other principles at their core:

It was never even considered by our tradition of political thought, which began after the ideal of the hero, the 'doer of great deeds and speaker of great words,' had given way to that of the statesman (*sic*) as lawgiver, whose function was not to act but to impose permanent rules on the changing circumstances and unstable affairs of acting men (*sic*).

For her this radical change in the public realm actually put an end to that space as it used to be. In her words what we have now is a social realm, a mimic of the public realm in which the logic is not action but a massive bookkeeping logic: the public space

instead of being "a space for the doer of great deeds and speaker of great words" ends up facilitating mostly private activities. That is to say, in opposition to the her idea of public realm, the social realm is framed in a way that supports the private enterprise, labor and work (Arendt 1998). Following this argument, politicians in office and in campaigns are hardly ever seen as "doers of great deeds and speaker of great words" but most of the time are bureaucratic leaders whose actions are signing bills to keep the economy growing and, consequentially, providing jobs and welfare to a giant private sphere, whether it is the country, the state or a municipality (let alone continental blocks such as the European Union).

This focus, according to my interviewees, is playing in favor of the *status quo* of these incumbent institutions; according to them even elected representatives are immersed in this mega operation of bookkeeping guided by numbers and economic indexes — precisely the metrics of success adopted by governments and corporations. Thus, they feel like politics and politicians in general are not helping them to empower individual creativity and autonomy. The result of Arendt's argument, together with my interviewees' skeptical take on politics, is an overarching disavowal to what we consider to be our public realm (or social realm, as Arendt would put it). In the middle of my interview with Maria, the Romanian girl who crowd funded the tuition for her Master's degree, she was commenting on her disapproval of politics and I asked if there are better or at least more honest politicians. She replied with another question: "Would they still be in politics?"

In spite of corruption and other arguably illegal and immoral aspects of politics

the point is that the structure of the state itself is the target of protesters such as the ones from 1968 — and as we discussed, they are strongly related to the dot com bubble, hacker and free and open software cultures (Palmås 2006). Together with the values of these groups is the will of crowd funding communities to empower individual creativity and autonomy. And this will, my interviewees would argue, is not contemplated by politicians:

Then you realise politics is so much associated with financial growth and I just haven't heard of a political discourse that is honest and humane in a long time. [A discourse that] can be a good model for people, that actually they [politicians] should represent. Thus, I think that's why I'm just disillusioned [...] we putting power in the hands of people that usually are not doing their job which is representing the bigger mass of people's interests (Maria).

Maria's quote, if understood in the context of the autonomy discussed earlier, shows how distant contemporary structures of power are from the crowd funding communities. Also, the debate so far has shown that part of what Maria cited as "the bigger mass of people's interests" is a detachment from and a disavowal of these very same power structures. Yet if the crowd funding community's will is more autonomy, the fit with Arendt's description of action is very appealing: first of all, as discussed in the chapter on the re-signification of money, labor and work are put aside and the focus on autonomy is put in the foreground to allow them to be "doers of great deeds and speaker of great words."

Earlier on in this chapter I mentioned that according to Arendt (1998) action is the only way through which humans can strive for immortality. For her, merely mortal

human beings can attempt to last forever — even as mortals — through actions. Her argument sustaining this philosophical provocation compares mortal humans with immortal gods — and especially gods that are *per se* doers of great deeds. Therefore, action is the unique way through which worldly deeds can confer upon a human being a status similar to the divine status: a doer of deeds that last forever. For her this is the idea of *vita activa*:

No matter how concerned a thinker may be with eternity, the moment he (*sic*) sits down to write down his (*sic*) thoughts he (*sic*) ceases to be concerned primarily with eternity and shifts his attention to leaving some trace of them. He (*sic*) has entered the *vita activa* and chosen its way to performance and potential immortality (Arendt 1998:20).

Vita activa is "a life devoted to public-political matters" (Arendt 1998:12) and therefore the core of Arendt's concept of action. At this point it may be simpler to discuss the distinction between labor, work and action. The point is not a mere classification in which the fulfilling of the most basic needs is labeled labor, the employment of skills to make labor easier is labeled work and great deeds are labeled action. Neither is it a mere division in terms of the private and public realm. Even if those claims are valid, they are too simplistic for the comprehension of action.

The concept of action encompasses an important dimension of the human condition itself. First of all, it has to do with human uniqueness, that is to say, to the fact that action only makes sense as each human being is essentially different from any other human being. If humans were equal, action would not be necessary but more radically probably this differentiation of human from nature would not exist either — in fact

Arendt (1998:46) claims this one-ness is the "specimen of the animal species man-kind" (*sic*). Second, these kinds of activities which are focused on deeds and not in labor and work are also intrinsically human:

The plurality of men (*sic*) [...] constitutes the political realm. It does so, first, in the sense that no human ever *exists* in the singular, which gives action and speech their specifically political significance, since they are the only activities which not only are affected by the fact of plurality, as are all human activities, but are altogether unimaginable apart from it. It is possible to conceive of a human world in the sense of a man-made (*sic*) artifice erected on the earth under the condition of the oneness of man [...] But an acting and speaking being existing in the singular cannot possibly be conceived (Arendt 2005:63, emphasis on original).

Therefore, the crowd funding communities do not seem to be excited with larger corporations and politicians joining their movement. What might be at stake is the lack of human spontaneity, the lack of this intrinsic uniqueness my interviewees miss in the logic of the decision making and valuing processes upheld by corporations and bureaucracies. Another way to put it is that my interviewees are looking to relate to human beings, not institutions: institutions, as Arendt claims, are locked in the private realm and arguably the crowd funding community is disillusioned by this.

Another way to sustain the disavowal for a more formal and less spontaneous human characteristic in this space is to refer to a quantitative linguistic research suggesting that low expressiveness is typical trace of scamming within crowd funding projects: "scammers deliberately try to deceive people by intentionally providing less information and writing more carefully and less informally" (Shafqat *et al* 2016:99).³³ The conclusion is

drawn from the fact that when comparing scam and non-scam projects within crowd funding, scammers tend to use less words, especially verbs and adverbs and, at the same time, showing less spelling errors. On the one hand there is no data on the success or failure in terms of the funds raised by scammers and non-scammers, but on the other hand researches like that reinforce that the formality that is typical in the corporate and political worlds are not the rule in crowd funding.

Juliana is a regular supporter of crowd funding campaigns, especially when they are related to causes she believes in like vegetarianism and cycling. She also supports local musicians and artistic projects. As a cyclist she is also into projects proposing new designs of bike tools and gadgets — apparels she sees as functional in a pragmatic way (such as plugging them to her bike and using it in her everyday life) as well as political (making biking easier is a political claim in urban mobility debates). She summarized her motivations to join crowd funding campaigns ultimately as a progressive political action, or yet a political provocation:

Crowd funding platforms enables a lot of actions that are constrained in our everyday life, actions related to autonomy and empowerment. I supported a lot of activism related projects ... I feel like for the more reactionary population in town [empowering activism] might sound insulting. Thus, I believe promoting activism is really a thing for me. I see many projects I supported that way.

She literally said her pledges in crowd funding campaigns are empowering in a political sense — even when buying a gadget. For her the source of this empowerment lies in the fact that the pledges and projects make her political views tangible in the world. It is

her way to be political in modern life. This phenomenon is not new: for instance, Giddens (1991) argues that nowadays the notion of self-identity is not given *a priori* by the institutions in a given individual trajectory; on the contrary people are constantly building a narrative to support their desired self-identity. From sociological streams like that one can comprehend even consumption as a political act (Micheletti 2003) — what would be an unusual diversion for the ancient Greeks and for Arendt. However, the point here is not to discuss if a commercial relationship concerns the private or the public realm but to describe the world view from which my interviewees consider crowd funding. For them it is definitively not about a marketplace: that is why they claim a specific relation to money, that is why they focus on autonomy for humans to be humans in the sense of spontaneity, authenticity and, as Arendt would put it, uniqueness — meaning that different citizens are putting their unique and intimate ideas forward in a democratic arena, seeking for support to be able to achieve great deeds.

The next section draws from that argument of crowd funding as action to describe situations in which my interviewees perceive themselves as actors in modern societies, even if the representative democracies seem to discourage this sort of action outside organized movements or in election periods (Arendt 1973). As discussed earlier the tone is not of confronting the *status quo* of government and corporations, but of navigating on the margins of these institutions. In other words, it is about allowing people to have a voice not against these institutions, but in spite of them.

6.2.2. Empowering action

Just as Juliana and many other interviewees argued, Talita seems to engage in crowd funding for purposes beyond the usual perks. She is a regular crowd funding supporter keeping the habit of browsing platforms such as Kickstarter every month to check up on new and interesting projects to support. She does not seem to be into provocations as Juliana would probably be: even as an earlier adopter of different technologies (such as social media or streaming services), when the innovation is illegal or in a grey area Talita prefers to wait for the government to explicitly regulate the newcomers before jumping in. She claims she has no illegal downloaded MP3s (opting instead to buy them on Google Play store) and she just started to ride Uber when the São Paulo mayor signed a bill regulating the activity of the startup in the city. In a similar argument as to Juliana, she told me that she is not into crowd funding merely because of gadgets:

Kickstarter is not a shopping mall. Surely the rewards are cool, I do love getting them. When one of them arrives, it makes me super happy. But I do not support [crowd funding projects] necessarily having these rewards in mind. I support [them] because I feel like saying "congratulations, dude. You have got a great idea, take 10 dollars. Or 50. Whatever." It really depends on what they have created. For me it works as a donation, it is the same as when I donate to the Red Cross or to the Médecins Sans Frontières: I open Kickstarter looking for cool projects and give money so the people [involved in these projects] can keep on thinking cool stuff.

Juliana and Talita's purposes represent pretty well the other people I talked to in the crowd funding community: many agree that engaging in such projects is a way to

put ideas forward. And for them that was the main purpose in crowd funding.

Lisandro is a Brazilian that has contributed to many campaigns for board games, amateur literature and other artistic projects. He told me that his wife mocks him when she catches him on a crowd funding website, saying, "go play patron." In spite of the playful tone she employs, sounding mostly as a joke, he seems to agree with her point of view: "In fact I am playing the patron. I am allowing things to happen, things that nobody else wanted to happen, things no one actually knew or expected to happen." When I interviewed him he drew a clearcut line splitting two kind of projects: on the one hand he labeled "projects" the ones that basically offered a product as a reward — sometimes he refers to these as "kickstarters" whether or not the website itself was indeed Kickstarter. On the other hand he had supported "authors" campaigns by pledging funds independent of a possible reward — that is to say, he was supporting the author, the creator of a project.

I see it as a way to support an author, one is not only supporting a specific project. The funny thing is that most of the times I get frustrated with kickstarters [...] than in projects that I am in fact supporting the author. Thus, most of the times I am supporting an author I end up overlooking an eventual sin they might commit. That is to say I do not stop believing that what they are doing, their action. This is what really matters. This has to go on because this is a way to achieve things that normally would not happen.

An "eventual sin" in that context was a project that failed to deliver the promised reward. That was not so disappointing for him because in such cases the focus of his support was on the action, on the idea the creator had, not in a material way. In a

similar tone, Juliana told me:

It would break trust if they [a given project] ended up not delivering the reward [...] But I would be fine if they offer an explanation, because this could give birth to a more affective tie between us. Usually this is the case of projects I feel strongly connected with: maybe they [the creators] are my friends, or they are fighting for a cause I believe in. So, there is already this sort of strong tie. If it is not a proper cause, at least it is something that really affects me, something I care about [...] So what I expect from such projects is that they succeed, I hope they can achieve what they are looking for. I would like to get my reward, to use the product, to see if it really works... and if it does I would probably recommend it all around. But if they fail to deliver it that would not make me stop believing in crowd funding, that would not make me curse them or anything like that.

Such statements, together with the dismissal of formal institutions in the crowd funding arena, are typical markers of a cultural shift. For instance, Palmås (2006) argued that this is the case of the 1968 generation: they have not overthrown any institution or specific political agenda but the effect of that political agitation "made lasting impact on Western culture." According to him this shift was "a furious attack on authority — and this critical approach to hierarchies has stayed with us since then" — in other words "people simply did not see the world in the same way after this period" (Palmås 2006:100-1). Until that point, all the anti-hierarchical, anti-bureaucratic, anti-corporation and anti-government discourse held by the crowd funding community might have been seen as a cultural shift as well -- or even as a mere continuation of the 1968 one.

To be clear, the point is that crowd funding communities have not overthrown any corporation or government. They have not pushed any multinational or political par-

ty to bankruptcy or shaken any incumbent market or political process, and probably they would never achieve any of this. As argued before, that is not their target; naïvely they prefer to run in the margins, minding their own business, while keeping institutions away from their everyday life. To Palmås (2006) the first generation of the twentieth first century would probably not follow the step of the twentieth century. He uses the analogy of seeing the world as a motor that even if it could be jammed would still follow a more specific set of rules. The alternative emerged together with the emergence of informatics and of the internet in seeing the world as an open computer network to be hacked. To illustrate this argument, he cites Muhammad Yunus as an example, a Bangladeshi man awarded with the Nobel Peace Prize for the creation of micro credit:

Rather than a purely social movement, microcredit is a socio-technical movement, enrolling humans as well as non-humans (such as financial instruments). Rather than a symbolic event (a display of public dissent; an event that throws gravel into the societal machinery) it is a tangible, techno-cultural innovation. Rather than seeing the system (the world of finance and banking) as a motor that follows pre-defined *modus operandi*, Yunus saw the economy as an open structure (or, if you will, an assemblage), whose mode of operation can change if new components are plugged into it. Most crucially, Yunus was naïve enough to develop innovations for this system, even though the essentialist Natural laws that are said to govern the system would suggest that such hacks are impossible (Palmås 2006:83).

If seen through that lens, the crowd funding community's focus on action, on enabling things that would not be backed by incumbent institutions, is a way to address problems of the world with a hacker mindset — or, in Palmås analogy, to see society as

an open computer network instead of a motor. Following this argument, the tone of the projects put forward within crowd funding communities is not a new marketplace trying to adapt itself to meet the expectations of traditional market transactions. In fact, it is the opposite since it consists of typical market transactions hacked to work according to a completely different logic. This new logic resignifies money, praises autonomy over bureaucracy and hierarchy, and allows individuals to have a political voice independent of more traditional political institutions.

By these means Arendt's conception of action, together with this hacker take on the structures of power of modern societies, properly describes the crowd funding community objectives: by downplaying any institution that might shadow individual wills and dreams the idea is to empower humans to go public about their projects. These projects have to be tangible: campaigns require a minimum budget and their realization depends on the total raised. To sum up, the idea is to put ideas online and end up with deeds to reassure the trust between creators and backers.

It is important to note that Arendt's view of action was always tied to a formal rhetoric in the public arena (1998). That might not be the case in crowd funding especially when a very attentive communication might raise suspicions of a scam (Shafqat *et al* 2016). In other words, it seems that a personal tone reinforcing the individuality rather than the formal aspect of the presentation is preferred in this new political space. However, such change can be a signal of how far hierarchical and bureaucratic organizations have gone in annihilating action from every single aspect of human life during the twentieth

century. As Boltanski and Chiapello (2011), Heath and Potter (2005) and Palmås (2006) have argued, particularly since 1968, different global societies have called this bureaucratization into question, with different levels of success and of pragmatism. Crowd funding is, therefore, playing this very same game. The crowd funding mechanism in this scenario is a mix of a showcase of ideas and fund raising, an arguably powerful recipe to empower people to action — or, in Arendt’s sense, a receipt to empower doers of great deeds. The greatness of the deeds comes from the uniqueness of each human being involved in the process, whether it is the creator that steps up into the public arena of the crowd funding platforms with his/her own ideas, or the supporters who feel part of the realization of the deeds because they allowed the creators to succeed (spreading the world, discussing and, mainly, donating money for the endeavor).

Furthermore, nowadays the possibility of being politically active in spite of the formal political structure is *per se* a bold claim. As discussed, Arendt (1973) claims that modern democracies offer citizens too much freedom in their private lives but very rare opportunities to actually exercise their free will in politics. Yet when they do, options are limited by a predefined menu put forwarded by organized political parties (Sniderman and Bullock 2004). On top of that there is the power conferred to money, mainly in the case of corporations and lobby (Wolin 2004). Crowd funding motivations represented by the world views of my interviewees seems to clearly establish a dialogue with all of these social debates, it is their way to step in this debate and to address issues in the power structures of modern societies.

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The title of this chapter was already a disclaimer for the reader: if there were harsh critiques to crowd funding communities they would be saved for another opportunity. Also, the promise of the title signaled that there is an important political aspect in crowd funding that should not be dismissed. In terms of social theory there are arguments and stories supporting that my interviewees are engaging with major debates regarding incumbent institutions such as the market and the government. Also, the arguments so far hopefully sustain that in different degrees of consciousness my interviewees are dialoguing with power structures as political actors.

Yet the title of this chapter also announces a certain optimism that the reader might align with a utopian view of the internet and, generally speaking, of technology as a whole. First, I must clarify that this optimism is sound and clear in most of my interviews — even people that see crowd funding as a kind of intermediary step to an uncertain future believe that by now crowd funding is powerful in putting forward ideas that would probably be left aside by mainstream economic and political thought.

In sum, my interviewees are pretty excited about becoming protagonists through crowd funding. For instance, Lisandro even joked that if until the 1990s people would struggle for their "15 minutes of fame" nowadays people are "famous for 15 people" instead. In spite of that, surely there are also critiques and boundaries on crowd funding pointed out by my interviewees. The next chapter debates the possible downsides of this sort of politics as put forward by crowd funding communities.

7. Isolation, silence and absence

The state is a modern phenomenon and its raison d'être was to develop, or better, to capitalize the power of society — the power resident in the human activities, and transactions that sustain life relationships, and its changing needs. The state became a coercive agency, declaring and enforcing law, punishing miscreants of all descriptions, systematizing taxation, encouraging commerce and manufacture in the direction of national economies, conducting diplomacy, waging war, and seeking empire. Its characteristic form of action is the decision which it "makes" with relentless regularity; its typical expression is the announcement of a "policy," and its mode of governance ranges from inducements to force (Wolin 1983:17).

The last chapter began with the introspective tone of Arendt's analysis on citizenship, particularly when theorizing about the political realm. In a normative way she claims the concept of action is what should lie at the core of politics, and as a consequence, citizens were expected to engage in a *vita activa*. However, in practice that is not what happened: her diagnosis of modern representative democracies is far from this ideal. As discussed, Arendt herself concluded that there is a lack of space for action, for example, since the private realm expanded too far from its original intent.

On top of that, she ponders the motives underneath this privatization of the public realm — not a privatization in the neoliberal way of conceding public interest endeavors to the private initiative, but as a way to signal that private interests are acting in places in which public interests were expected.

At a certain point Arendt discusses the concept of forgiveness together with ac-

tion and the industrial revolution (2005:57-59). According to her, as action is the foundation of the anew, forgiving "attempts the seemingly impossible, to undo what has been done." As a consequence, "it [forgiveness] succeeds in making a new beginning where beginnings seemed to be no longer possible." This is relevant in her argument as she foresees a structure that is typical in complexity theory:³⁴ that actions lead to "a chain of unpredictable consequences" in which even the person who acted ends up as "both actor and victim in this chain of consequences." Finally, she highlights how the technological advances in the last decades, together with this complexity of action and forgiveness, have made of action a sort of volatile basis for modern democracies:

It was only with the sudden and disconcerting rush of the gigantic technical developments after the industrial revolution that the experience of fabrication achieved such an overwhelming predominance that the uncertainties of action could be forgotten altogether; talk could then begin about "making the future" and "building and improving society" as though one were talking about making chairs and building and improving houses" (Arendt 2005:58).

Her normative approach allows her to critically study the shifting boundaries of the private and the public, and discuss how citizens themselves have a blurred understanding of the boundaries of private and public interests — let alone the realms for each of these approaches. In ancient Greece only a small percentage of citizens were allowed in the public arena; among other reasons because only the ones with land and slaves were able to provide for themselves and their families, or in other words were able to leave private interests aside when stepping into the public arena.

Industrial revolutions and especially the rapid industrial growth in the second half of the twentieth century might have made labor and work easier and abundant, and as a result made the production of goods cheaper and also abundant. It is reasonable to expect that this new technological progress would end up alleviating the weight on citizens' shoulders when it comes to meeting their private interests and needs: it would be easier for them to provide for their families, labor would be gradually taken over by machines, the production of food, supplies and all sort of goods would get cheaper over time, and once the pressure to provide was minimized by this new condition, engaging in action in the public realm would be easier than ever. In sum, with the help of industrial equipment and automation, wage earners and entrepreneurs would easily be well off, especially when compared to their ancient Greek ancestors.

However, this is not what happened. For Arendt the success in managing private interests has not enabled more and more citizens to devote themselves to public interests. Instead it has actually pushed society to transpose the logic of one realm to the other, that is to say, this scenario has led to an attempt to apply the same logic guiding the private realm into the public realm. And yet according to Arendt (1973), that move has led to a bold transformation: indeed, what was known as the public realm became a massive social realm — a gigantic bookkeeping activity, as mentioned in the last chapter. Even worse for Arendt's normative speculations: the state has become a place for bureaucratic rulers, not for doers of great deeds. And for her this was not a surprise: in ancient Greece there were already two ideas of rulers and ruled; a very authoritative source of power, and another

that was more interested in freedom of ideas and politics:

The concept of rule, as we find it in Plato and as it became authoritative for the tradition of political thought, has two distinct sources in private experience. One is the experience which Plato shared with other Greeks, according to which rule was primarily rule over slaves and expressed itself in the master-servant relationship of command and obedience. The other was the "utopian" need of the philosopher to become the city's ruler, that is, to enforce in the city those "ideas" which can be perceived only in solitude (Arendt 2005:52-53).

The preceding chapter which focused on my interviewees' efforts to get into action through crowd funding was also an attempt to circumvent this tradition of political thought based on rule and obedience: their way to praise autonomy and their non-confrontational strategy empowered them to go on without rulers or regulation -- as they would probably put it. Whilst some of my interviewees proudly acknowledge these strategies, from a political theory perspective these strategies require further investigation.

This chapter analyzes two branches of critiques relevant in this scenario. First, by dismissing authority altogether, by praising autonomy and adopting a marginal path to institutions, crowd funding communities end up in a sort of self-sustaining echo chamber: technology allows people with common interests to easily gather and support each other, raising funds for projects that arguably are unanimous inside their own bubble, their own social circle — and, in some cases, unanimous only inside these circles. This scenario is indeed similar to a typical antipolitical *anything goes* mindset as suggested by Schedler (1997:8): for him a political community "needs to be free from external constraints" as much as, "at least to a minimal degree, it must be able to impose internal con-

straints on its members." Yet at the same time this isolation in autonomous bubbles is also a problem for the political in Mouffe's (2005:3) analysis:

Instead of trying to design the institution which, through supposedly "impartial" procedures, would reconcile all conflicting interests and values, the task for democratic theorist and politicians should be to envisage the creation of a vibrant "agonistic" public sphere of contestation where different hegemonic political projects can be confronted.

The first half of this chapter takes on this antipolitical argument. Following this, I draw on the sociology of ignorance in order to shed light on the world view and the power structures involved in the crowd funding communities. This is the case when many interviewees seem to be so excited about the doors opened by crowd funding while they seem to have a blurred view — if any — of the boundaries and risks of such engagement. The bubble effect mentioned earlier is an example: most of the crowd funding community would say that being famous for 15 people (instead of having their 15 minutes of fame, as Lisandro put it) is inherently a good thing, without asking themselves if empowering any kind of 15 people is actually a desired effect in political terms. This is characteristic of a strategic usage of ignorance which is useful "to maintain and to disrupt social and political orders, allowing both governors and the governed to deny awareness of things it is not in their interest to acknowledge" (McGoey 2012:4). The second half of this chapter goes deeper into this argument.

What follows is based on a few interviews in which my informants seemed to be keen to discuss the social and political costs of crowd funding and platform building

Interestingly, even those who pointed in the direction of the antipolitical or ignorance critiques were people convinced that being part of the crowd funding community — supporting projects and eventually creating their own projects — was a very interesting possibility in terms of the social, cultural and financial aspects. The tensions in handling these apparent opposing views were important sources of information for this chapter. Finally, in some cases the unsaid ended up telling interesting parts of the history, therefore I try and explicate the importance of silences and absence when relevant to the analysis. When this happens the reader is clearly informed about it.

7.1. Antipolitical crowd funding

Adam, the Parisian amateur filmmaker, was one amongst my interviewees who supported two kinds of projects: the ones from friends or acquaintances, and the ones for causes he believed in. As he was describing this last category of projects I had the feeling they were progressive in terms of political affiliation: healthy organic cooking, female empowerment, collaborative redesign of public spaces and so on. Following on from that he declared he was very enthusiastic about crowd funding, not only because it enabled him to donate to these causes, but basically because this mechanism allowed niche content to be produced, distributed and to reach their very specific public. He added that the advertisement business model like the one behind YouTube (in which the creator of the video

gets a percentage of the income from advertising according to the number of views of the video) has failed on that. However, he maintains that crowd funding has a higher chance of succeeding in that task.

His argument is based on the small percentage of ad income that goes to the creator in the YouTube model. Also, he added that this revenue is only a reality for videos with a really high number of views. For example, a creator posting 20 videos per week with 1 million subscribers gets between 7 and 8 dollars per thousand views (Edwards 2014). This is a lot of effort to produce a massive amount of content — and still Google keeps a substantial ratio of the ad money. Google's monetization policies are complex, but from the start they cut-off users without audience range: one "can apply for monetization at any time" but must have "at least 4,000 watch hours in the previous 12 months and 1,000 subscribers" (Google 2018). Yet there is a secret algorithm that balances how much the company advertising has paid for that ad, and how much Google is passing to the video creator. The media estimates that roughly 50% of the income is kept by Google (Edwards 2014).

Following Adam's thoughts, together with the figures above, if only 1% of the 1 million subscribers of a given creator donated 1 dollar every month, the youtuber would end up with the same annual income (when compared to the YouTube model estimative). Therefore, Adam believes there is, within crowd funding, a huge potential for more productivity, more quality and less worries about inflating production and views (as in ad-based platforms, let alone battling ad-blockers). In sum, for him, in order to make a living

from niche content, crowd funding seems more promising than the YouTube ad income distribution. And my interviewees in general are very optimistic about seeing more and more niche projects out there.

Next, but still related to niche contents, Adam shared an opinion that seemed convergent on the idea of echo chambers contained in small bubbles within the digital world. This is how he described the phenomenon:

I have seen a lot of my old friends talking to the hand, people talking with people that agree with them. There is no debate at all. There is nothing being build that way either. People take things to the extreme and they manage to find other people agreeing with them. All out of sudden extremist ideas are a consensus. People start believing that whatever they were willing to believe beforehand is a consensus, is the obvious. For me this is the dynamics of social media nowadays.

Lisandro also believes that these bubbles exist, and that crowd funding revolves around these small communities. He actually used to get involved in the community, going to meet ups and meeting people in person, especially in some fields he is passionate about, such as literature, for example. In fact, this was an old habit from the time when he owned a second-hand bookstore: the business was not exactly profitable but worth it because of the community that regularly gathered around the venue, he claimed. This bubble effect is still valid in his crowd funding routine, as he describes the relationship between him and the project creators he usually supports:

Even when I do not know them in person they are people I follow on Twitter, authors I like. I feel close to them as I follow the projects they run, so it is a group, you feel like you are part of it. There are also some video initiatives on YouTube I support because I watch the videos. I can pay one dollar a month for them, I can afford it if

they keep on shooting new videos. I see this as clear-cut exchange [...] I am willing to pay for the content [I consume] and when you actually know the person [creating that content], even if not in person but via social media, it is way easier to support their projects.

Emily, part of the team who founded a British crowd funding platform, believes that this community effect around crowd funding is more attractive than the possibility of making money. In other words, it is about a collaborative relationship, and not a merely patron-creator relationship in which one part financially supports the other:

I do not think there is all that many people who set out because they are like "I want to make millions of pounds." They kind of set out because they are like "I think this is a really interesting business model." It shifts things so that some of the most effective Kickstarter projects are the ones effectively getting user information. You get to connect with your users. You get to iterate and change your project much faster as you are going along, and you get advanced orders, so the risk is lower. It feels like a much more connected relationship that those projects typically have with the people who will be using that project.

She is not denying that there are different mindsets around crowd funding, but, for her friends and contacts, trying to become rich through crowd funding was not seen as common or widespread in this environment: "maybe that is something more [common] on the kind of equity-based crowd funding platforms," she ponders. Her argument also brings in a business mindset shared by other interviewees (Daniel, the German interested in board games, for example): the case in which acting within a given community or social network reduces the economic risk of an enterprise. In sum, there are different approaches the crowd funding community refer to in order to emphasize how the more personal side of their relations grants a more coherent space for them. Within this space, and with cash

circulating amongst people in the bubble, the anew (that is to say, the freedom claimed by the French and American revolutions) can be finally achieved.

These stories are relevant to reinforce how important these communities emerged from niche contents are for crowd funding. This fact resonates theories that puts together the social and the economic world through social networks of individuals. For instance, Granovetter (1985:491) stated that "social relations, rather than institutional arrangements or generalized morality, are mainly responsible for the production of trust in economic life." For him understanding how people establish social relations is a crucial step to understand organizations and economic action — following his argument, this strategy is more fruitful than the undersocialized model in which individuals supposedly behave "as atoms outside a social context," and more fruitful than the oversocialized model in which individuals "adhere slavishly to a script written for them by the particular intersection of social categories that they happen to occupy" (Granovetter 1985:487). In the crowd funding community this is important not only from the economic perspective, but from the trust perspective — or, to be more precise, this focus allows us to understand the way these communities build and maintain trust through individuals connected in a social network:

Better than the statement that someone is known to be reliable is information from a trusted informant that he (*sic*) has dealt with that individual and found him so. Even better is information from one's own past dealings with that person. This is better information for four reasons: (1) it is cheap; (2) one trusts one's own information best—it is richer, more detailed, and known to be accurate; (3) individuals with whom one has a continuing relation have an economic

motivation to be trustworthy, so as not to discourage future transactions; and (4) departing from pure economic motives, continuing economic relations often become overlaid with social content that carries strong expectations of trust and abstention from opportunism (Granovetter 1985:490)

Also the kind of social tie described by my informants in this context of niche content is a weak tie. The strength of a social tie can be understood comparing how much time two people spend together and how committed they are to each other (Granovetter 1973). Friends who talk to each other very often are examples of strong ties. Examples of weak ties are people who can reach each other, but that do not interact too often; they might send a message once in a while, usually about very specific topics though. Granovetter (1973:1378) argued that the weak ties are crucial for community building: "weak ties, often denounced as generative of alienation are here seen as indispensable to individuals' opportunities and to their integration into communities." And that seems to be precisely the case of the relationship Adam, Emily and Lisandro described in the last few paragraphs.³⁵

At this point it is worth calling into question which issues the crowd funding enthusiasts might be leaving behind. If in the last chapter I highlighted that Mouffe criticized Arendt's idea of politics, on the grounds that Arendt's ideas would be too optimistic for the public realm, the same sort of question is valid for my interviewees' world view. If the point of view argued in the last paragraph was the only side of this coin, autonomy would allow a plethora of ideas and actions in the public space, and crowd funding would allow people to join forces to make them happen. If all that was actually happen-

ing, Mouffe's (2005:3) arguments would be a harsh attack on the success of crowd funding as a form of political engagement: that would be to completely eliminate the "agonistic" side of the public realm in favor of a multitude of niche endeavors that would never collapse and debate with each other. Different (and arguably hegemonic) projects and ideas could emerge, but they would hardly ever (if ever) be confronted.

To begin, and taking Mouffe's quote from the beginning of this chapter, crowd funding is not an impartial procedure. This might be a multifaceted issue and probably it is not feasible to exhaust all the possible ways to argue that impartiality is not a strength of crowd funding. My interviewees would argue in a kind of libertarian tone that anyone could pledge in any crowd funding campaign — and that would be enough to label crowd funding as "democratic" as they say, or as "impartial" as inferred by them. Surely this is not the case. The basic argument would be that not everybody is online (48% of the world is, 41% if we take only developing countries, or 81% in developed countries) and that not everybody online actually trusts the web enough to make an online payment (21% of Americans that are online do not shop online).³⁶

Moving away from assumptions based on quantitative surveys, it is also possible to discuss the impartiality of crowd funding from qualitative standpoints. For instance, my interviewees, as discussed before, are very similar in terms of their social and educational background. They are usually people who have had access to higher education and that can take risks more easily than others because they have a reliable safety net. Those from outside the global north have fluent English and some experiences abroad

(usually they studied and/or worked in the global north). This fact cannot be ignored when pondering about the impartiality of crowd funding: these trajectories socially influence the way these individuals face the world, also influencing their personal values, strategies, aspirations and notions of right and wrong, of success and failure. All these aspects end up internalized as a disposition to act in a similar fashion (Bourdieu 1970):

It is one thing to say that working-class youth do not enter French universities because they fear failure, and quite another to say that getting a higher education does not belong to their world view or class structure. In the former case, these youths might value higher learning and have hopes of attending the university but choose not to attend because they expect to fail. In the latter case, they would have no desire to attend the university and therefore no expectations (Swartz 1997:109).

In other words, the crowd funding community share so much in common that it is expected that it will reproduce their values instead of acting as an impartial platform (Tufekci 2014, 2015 and 2016) — especially when some of the platform founders and staff I interviewed explicitly referred to the analogy of putting the curatorial layer to keep the platform a garden and not a thicket (that is to say, they cherry pick the projects that go online, they help creators to produce videos, text and images passing a specific kind of message etc.). Even in the face of some tensions (such as whether it is acceptable or not to use Kickstarter basically as a shop window) my interviewees share similar world views in many other perspectives.

Following Mouffe's quote, crowd funding does not reconcile conflicting interests and values either. Beyond the similarity discussed above, the mechanism itself is not

focused on debating, or in contrasting ideas, but mostly in isolating the needs (the financial target of each campaign) from the rest of the campaigns. In this scenario, even contradictory projects could end up funded and their supporters would never meet to discuss if these ideas can cohabit in the very same society. For example, at the same time as a white supremacist might be raising funds to keep their podcast production running, supporters of Black Lives Matter might be funding a documentary about their social movement. Actually, there were attempts from these opposing groups to raise funds through crowd funding. From the example mentioned, a studio from London launched a campaign to shoot a documentary called "The Third Dimension: #BlackLivesMatter" (Indiegogo 2016). On the other hand, after being flagged in the media for hosting campaigns for white supremacists and neo-Nazis, many platforms started to bring down these specific campaigns (Independent 2017) — they were happy with political crowd funding, but certain agendas such as these extreme right-winged campaigns were not considered acceptable by the platforms' terms.

In spite of these attempts towards a diversity of ideas and debate, this might not be even expected in crowd funding. Chris is a scholar, an expert in the sharing economy. He pondered on a basic profile of people engaged in crowd funding and in the sharing economy as a whole:

What I've observed in the discourse around the sharing economy is the values and qualities that people project onto this technology are then reflected back out again in terms of the stories, the narratives about the sharing economy. Say those people who believe the internet is an inherently liberating democratic technology: that be-

lief then shapes what they think the sharing economy is and can become. You get the actors who essentially talk about a sharing economy which is a very digitally enabled society and economy, but which is very libertarian, but more from the libertarian left philosophy.

The corpus of my field work tends to corroborate Chris's idea. But even if this is not true and the community is really diverse, ranging from neo-Nazis to #BlackLivesMatter, in both campaign examples above there was no debate on the validity of these ideas to society, neither on the possibility of the coexistence of these ideals in a public space. And even when the decision to not host campaigns for groups of a given credo, the decision was unilateral and non agonistic, as Mouffe believes democratic bodies should be. And yet this kind of decision might be, by itself, an argument in favor of the similar world views shared by the crowd funding communities: there is a great possibility that even if the crowd funding community allows multiple and diverse initiatives to be launched, it is arguably a political tool focused on a specific kind of public: it will respond to the specific demands of this specific public and amplify their range of action -- ending up as an ever-growing echo chamber. Even if my interviewees believe they have the greatest intentions, this is not necessarily democratic in Mouffe's sense.

Finally, Mouffe's quote refers not only to the confrontation of ideas, but also to hegemonic political projects. In that sense there is arguably a two-fold critique towards the crowd funding communities: the kinds of projects they put forward are at most public goods with a limited range. Cases like the crowd funding of public transportation or of museums are quite rare (Indiegogo 2014), and even if it can be considered a remarkable

public good, it does not put different hegemonic political projects face to face. This museum case, for instance, put on evidence the figure of Nikola Tesla: they raised funds to buy the site of a well-known antenna designed by him and planned to open a museum there. In popular culture the name of this famous engineer arguably reinforces a very specific set of characteristics common to many of my interviewees: a utopian view of technology, a kind of vote for a frugal life, an open knowledge approach to people's own work (or, to put it differently, a controversial disavowal of copyright and patents) etc. And, again, if this political project is put forward by crowd funding, there is no hegemonic antagonism to it within the crowd funding community.

In Shedler's (1997:3) words, politics involves "the definition of societal problems and conflicts, the elaboration of binding decisions and the establishment of its own rules." Crowd funding is a kind of open space where ideas mature in their own bubbles, without running into each other; in other words, the notion of conflict is downgraded because anyone can submit any idea, and the notion of a problem is reduced in a pecuniary total, the target of the campaign. Once these pecuniary targets are reached there is no need for binding decisions or any kind of dependence between people involved in such projects and outsiders. And surely the highest bar crowd funding afforded to put in rules are unilateral decisions taken by founders and staff of the platforms, together with individual decisions to support or not each project. Therefore, in spite of action empowering in Arendt's sense, there are strong critiques to consider the crowd funding community as political from the perspective of the way they organize the interaction amongst their

members.

It appears that my interviewees would stand for crowd funding, claiming that at least it allows projects to be funded outside of the agenda of incumbent institutions. As government and corporations are important stakeholders in funding new endeavors, this argument is indeed important. For instance, from within the field of the sociology of ignorance, Hess (2015) alerts us to the impacts of undone science (studies that strategically are not funded or are underfunded) in social movements and social change. For him (2015:142) "the idea of undone science draws attention to a kind of non-knowledge that is systematically produced through the unequal distribution of power in society," and this does not happen unintentionally; on the contrary "it involves the systematic underfunding of a specific research agenda, and the underfunding occurs through a continuum of mechanisms" (2015:143). As his research is based on undone science and social movements, this reinforces that certain kinds of investments are not made by incumbent institutions in order to hold back the advancement of certain agendas:

Thus, in the U.S. today there is a proliferation of local first movements, bank local and local currency movements, cooperatives, credit unions, B corporations, worker ownership, and, to a lesser degree, the municipalization or re-municipalization of services, but these innovations tend to remain in a niche position with respect to the model of the publicly traded, large corporation. Instead, large corporations have selectively adopted some of the elements of the movements while simultaneously rejecting the fundamental challenge that they had aimed to propose (Hess 2015:148).

The sociology of ignorance can shed light on the dark side of crowd funding

from a perspective that embraces an arguably positive use of ignorance, as described in this section, a situation in which some aspects are left aside to empower an agenda that is cherished by the community. However, the sociology of ignorance can also shed light on other dissonances that crowd funding refers to in order to keep to its promises, revealing a negative aspect of leaving ideas and discussions unveiled and untouched, and that is what is discussed in the following section.

7.2. Dodging dystopia

Certainly, Adam's idea of niche contents (mentioned earlier in this chapter) is not an odd statement. Indeed, it is similar to Pariser's (2012) best seller *The Filter Bubble*, a book basically blaming algorithms for isolating people in bubbles of users alike: for example, Google show results similar to the ones you have already clicked on in the past, or your Facebook feed is assembled from posts of things data science predicts you will probably engage with (like, share, comment or whatever keeps your attention within the social media website). This strategy pulls apart controversial contents from each and every on-line user.

However, in opposition to Pariser, Adam does not seem convinced that algorithms filtering our content are actually the only cause of these bubbles. Actually, he is closer to Bishop's (2008) argument in *The Big Sort*: as a result of the success of the welfare

state, the book claims, Americans felt free to move wherever they want within the continental country. This freedom has resulted in a clear-cut polarization reflecting like-minded groups: in general liberals moved to metropolitan centers such as New York and San Francisco, while conservatives group in Orange County and Colorado Springs for example. This bubble effect happened even before social media and the internet. As Bishop, Adam believes that technology is not the one to blame when it comes to this topic:

Corporations have no ideology. They do what makes the most money, what gives them more profits — except in rare cases in which Facebook [for example] stands for Israel, for Jews etc. But most of the time you take any of the big media companies and you see some to the right, some to the left, but all of them will be focus in the return of investments. If you take Fox News in the USA, there are people interested in that kind of content, people willing to put money on that. If we did not have these people, we would not have it [Fox News]. I do not like this idea that Fox [News] causes conservatism. Both [people interested in Fox News contents, and Fox News itself] are parts of a cycle. And that is the same with crowd funding, and with social media. One can create mechanisms to bring conflict in, to bring discourse in, to promote the debate of opposing ideas. But people just do not care. That is not what they want (Adam).

What Adam is suggesting is that there is an unequivocal bias in the way people communicate and in the way institutions intermediate this communication. Therefore, even if the crowd funding platforms have no active voice in the global and mainstream media, they depend on the strategies for reaching as many people as possible. This tends to build a strong dependency between crowd funding campaigns and social media corporations — this is the best and cheapest way many of my interviewees have found to spread the word about each campaign. This fact introduces a kind of unattended bias

in the crowd funding community as a whole: when my interviewees claim that there are projects out there, and that people are free to contribute to any project they like, my informants are neglecting their own reliance on corporate media in order to publicize their platforms — thus compounding a cathartic but false impression of autonomy from the corporate realm. This reliance must be minimized and denied, even to themselves; strategic ignorance is thus embraced in order for their perception of their own autonomy to persist.

A starting point to re-frame this story, highlighting the often unknown or ignored aspects of crowd funding dynamics, can be found in the studies about how micro-donations are influencing politics (Margetts *et al* 2013). In the case of online petition campaigns there is a prominent importance of a new kind of leadership: there is "a general shift from leaders and elite to members or individuals" (Margetts *et al* 2013:3). In other words, characteristics typical of online petitioning (and I might add, online crowd funding) campaigns create a new dynamic for political action in which:

contemporary political mobilisations can become viable without leading individuals and organisations to undertake organisation and coordination costs, proceeding to critical mass and even achieving the policy or political change at which they are aimed (Margetts *et al* 2013:19).

These characteristics include, for example, micro donations (of time in online petitions and of time and money in crowd funding), low start-up costs (no need of great investments to launch an online petition or crowd funding campaign) and the impor-

tance of a certain number of people willing to start (signing the petition or donating to crowd funding). Actually, this last example is crucial: most of the successful online petitions that reached a significant amount of signatures had a steep rise in the very first days. Margetts *et al* (2013) argue that instead of having the trustworthiness of more incumbent institutions and leaders, these new online mobilizations are more passive to externalities -- that is to say, dependent on the number of signatures already added to a given petition (and I might add, the amount of money already pledged in a crowd funding campaign) and on the people who shared the link for the campaign page. As Margetts *et al* (2013:18) summarize:

In this environment, leadership is the aggregate of many low-cost actions undertaken by those willing to start, rather than the raft of actions and characteristics of the few with which it is normally associated. Of course, the group of starters will usually include at least one leader in a more traditional mould who has taken a higher-cost action: for example, the person who sets up a petition and circulates it to close associates in their immediate social networks. But the number of starters needed to get the mobilisation off the ground will be beyond that possible to obtain with strong ties to the initiator alone, but will be attained with weak ties, such as the friend of a friend of a friend on a social networking site, or the retweet of the retweet of a tweet [...] By providing this social information, internet-based platforms circumvent the need for other activities traditionally performed by leaders.

In this scenario the unattended subjectivities of how information circulates are very important. In spite of some of my interviewees (Adam, for example) being willing to discuss the power of social media underpinning the success of crowd funding, that kind of reflection was mostly seen in experts I interviewed for this research. And, as men-

tioned, this discussion is not a detail, but a relevant topic for any sociological inquiry aiming at understanding the social and political nature of crowd funding. Most of the people I talked to have shown a very optimistic, maybe naïve, approach to the topic. Emily, for instance, focuses on close networks, stronger ties, and links the emergence of crowd funding to national macroeconomic changes:

It sort of feels like a shift away from consumer who just buys and producer into a much more collaborative relationship [...] Certainly the people that I've spoken with just tend to be characterized by a much more collaborative approach to the way that they want to run the project or the business [...] I do have some skepticism over the position of crowd funding more generally, particularly over Nesta involvement (I suppose) with it.³⁷ Not that I think that it comes from any personal, not that I doubt the personal intentions of anyone, but I think the timing of it was coming in right when the government cuts were sort of being ushered in. Right after. There's a handy narrative.

Lisandro is an enthusiast of this sort of more collaborative business model, but he made a two-fold critique on crowd funding as political nowadays. While debating about the kinds of powers acting in society, he called expressiveness into question: for him there are two sorts of powers, an incumbent power (basically external from the community, power that has its sources in the incumbent institutions) and an effective power (felt as stronger within the crowd funding community). Therefore, this more collaborative empowerment was promising in putting people close to each other:

My idea is that you basically flatten relationships, thus in reality incumbent power ends up weaker than effective power. And this effective power is established because one's own expression skills. Those who know better how to express themselves have some advantages because they can clearly show how passionate they are about a cer-

tain subject. They have way more power than people imbued with institutional power.

In addition, Lisandro also criticized the way corporate power is managing not only crowd funding but the sharing economy as a whole:

I live in Copacabana, in Rio [Rio de Janeiro, Brazil]. In my building I guess there are only four permanent residents. The rest is all Airbnb. In a certain way these are disaggregating activities, [activities that make] you monetize collaboration.

With these quotes Lisandro clearly highlights two topics that are left behind when people (including Lisandro himself) take an optimistic view of the potential of crowd funding. First, we have all the subjective qualities of platforms and creators (for example, as he said, how well one can communicate their own ideas to the world) and we also have the bubble effect. Second, we have the perception of a more open and collaborative mechanism to sort out ideas that is only possible through very centralized mechanisms: the crowd funding platform themselves and the social media with some reach, for example. It is only by ignoring these issues, and only by ignoring what unfolds from them (such as the effect of algorithms regulating how messages spread through social media, or the power of the platforms as intermediaries) that these kinds of communities can be perceived as an efficient and new form of political and democratic action.

When discussing autonomy, many interviewees mentioned the power of crowd funding to tackle the intermediary, the middleman, in some markets. I have discussed earlier, on chapter 4, *Re-signifying money*, how this might end up as the opposite: more power concentrated in the hand of a few platforms, less choices, (because these platforms have

influence on the content reach) and, as a consequence, less debate. In other words, the libertarian freedom necessary for the *motto* "there are projects out there and people are free to pledge in any of them" cannot be taken for granted. Beyond that, what might be left of the argument is the idea of crowd funding nurturing a more collaborative environment. At this point Sam, an expert in sharing economy, offered some critiques similar to Lisandro's:

AirBnB is intermediary for short-term rentals and Uber is a taxi service, neither of which are really sharing. Especially Uber, I would say, is not sharing because it's a taxi service. You're not actually sharing a ride. From an environmental perspective, and I know there's the environmental arguments for the sharing economy, as far as Uber goes, it's people driving around in cars to pick other people up. It's facilitating greenhouse gas emissions, rather than preventing it.

The point here is that there are a series of questions that might downplay the political potential of crowd funding, or at least call into question how democratic these political possibilities really are. Hence it is crucial to ask whether this attitude of ignoring some issues grants some strategic advantages to enthusiasts of crowd funding (as well as to advocates of the sharing economy). It is not a matter of labeling informants as naïve or Machiavellian, but as McGoey (2012:11) puts it:

Social scientists, in writing about ignorance, must better acknowledge their own ignorance of the unarticulated or simply unconscious rationales of the individuals they suggest may be deliberately harnessing ignorance.

In order to assess what is political about crowd funding it is mandatory to inquire about the nature of the optimism declared by most of my interviewees. In other

words, the claimed collaborative aspect as well as the social impacts expected from it must be investigated. At this point one possibility is to frame crowd funding together with social entrepreneurship, social innovation and other expressions commonly used to describe the social impact of crowd sourcing, crowd funding and other economies brought to life by the intense use of the internet. Following this argument, the next step would be to understand what these labels actually mean — however, as McGoey (2015) argues, that is not a trivial task:

What sets the 'social' entrepreneur apart from more traditional ones is an emphasis on *motivation*. According to Elkington and Hartigan, the new breed of socially aware entrepreneur is motivated by a deep sense of injustice at market imbalances that prevent disadvantaged from accessing market goods. 'Time and again,' they write, 'these entrepreneurs have had a life-transforming experience, some sort of an epiphany that launched them on their current mission (McGoey 2015:67, emphasis in original).'³⁸

Following up with the discussion, she adds in the very next paragraph: "Unfortunately, specific definition of what that 'mission' may be and how it is accomplished are often quite vague" (McGoey 2015:67). In other words, referring to social entrepreneurship and related areas might not offer a proper framework to discuss crowd funding as it is a blurred field *per se*. Moreover, even if this social mission was a valid purpose, it is another challenge to discuss how successful ventures actually are:

Corporate benchmarks such as increased revenue, more generous dividends, or higher share valuations simply don't translate as neatly into measuring social outcomes as social entrepreneurs often presume. Most social entrepreneurs want to prove that their business practices or their activism yield positive social results — something that's dubbed, in the TED Head world, 'social return on investment'

(SROI). Like generations before them, they quickly confront one of the oldest challenges of social sciences: proving causality. [...] Given this challenge, many philanthropic institutions and social enterprises turn to proxy measures in order to gauge their effectiveness (McGoey 2015:70).

The point here is that there is much unsaid and unspecified about the social impact of crowd funding promises such as bringing people together, nurturing niche markets, and offering an apparently more collaborative alternative to the standard political options. In spite of the ideological and aspirational good vibes of the crowd funding community, there is no way to clearly prove or deny their social impact. As mentioned, it sounds reasonable to expect crowd funding to be a counterpoint to incumbent fund-raising agendas (as in Hess 2015, for example), however, the general tone of their autonomy (based on their "running on the margins of society" assumption) makes it difficult to assert the claims found during my fieldwork. Even if it all seems to make sense, one must be attentive: for example, when McGoey (2015:77-78) discusses micro credit, despite the optimistic fuzz, the Nobel prizes, and all the acknowledgment of this arguably revolutionary loan mechanism, its real social impact is a failure for the communities it was supposed to empower. Crowd funding still lacks such scrutiny to be able to sustain its claims.

In other words, we can confirm that many projects came to life through a series of micro-donations which coordinate crowd funding platforms and social media — many projects that, a couple of decades ago, might have been unconceivable. In spite of that, the political (and economic) effects of such endeavors is based on a naïve understanding of freedom: for crowd funding to be open and accessible for everyone to pledge in anything

they like, one must consider that everybody is online, that filter bubbles do not exist, that everybody can spare some cash to pledge, that everybody is minimally digitally literate and so on. In sum, a series of requirements that are not out there in the world. Alternatively, crowd funding could be a strong political tool for specific groups: groups that are connected to the internet on a daily basis, groups of people close to each other online, groups that can save some money to donate to causes, content producers and gadgets, and groups that are either digital natives or literate in technology. That is indeed a possibility, but this possibility is not what my interviewees claimed — they usually supported a more libertarian tone, instead. Dismissing this libertarian tone what is left is, potentially, a rich political tool for a very specific public.

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Stephen, the British entrepreneur in the startup market, was one of the most skeptical on the possibilities of crowd funding as political action. But even he seemed to find a possibility, a kind of workaround to the arguably antipolitical and strategic use of unknowns within crowd funding:

So, something like Uber and Airbnb: I have a real problem with them because I think if they were local businesses it would be fantastic. I love the use of technology but the fact that these guys now are... I mean Uber will end up owning every fucking taxi driver in the world [...] And then if you talk to some of the guys who use it they go "yeah, well it's quite good for us because we get more businesses." But in the end, it's a lot of power in one company. And I think it's kind of what I object to, there's no trickle, so it's making richer people even richer.

What is at stake here is a tension similar to the one discussed earlier: in the attempt to replace the middleman, the crowd funding community vouched for a new middleman — replacing the stakeholder, but politically speaking, keeping a very specific gatekeeper for the political voices. This process is very similar to what happened in the digital culture industry (Allen-Robertson 2013): free culture activists pushed against pre-established cultural gatekeeper institutions (recording labels), broke them down (with piracy and MP3 sharing) and opened the door for a new range of corporation gatekeepers to take over (Spotify and Apple iTunes, for example). It appears what we have in this attempt from crowd funding to empower people ended up nurturing more institutions to manage people's political voices. On that matter Chris envisages that the hopes and aspirations of utopian (and maybe libertarian) takes on technology might be compromised by the way things evolve in modern capitalism — in an argument that resonates the power of capitalism to swallow counter culture, as suggested by Heath and Potter (2005), by Boltanski and Chiapello (2011), and as discussed in the previous chapter:

I personally think that obviously the internet has the potential to support that type of economy, but it also has the potential if you view the internet as a commercial opportunity -- and then that feeds into the idea that the sharing economy is a huge commercial opportunity as well. Then you get stories of the next app [mobile application] of the sharing economy is the next phase of e-business or is the next phase of the evolution of the internet.

In the stream of this argument this chapter has shed light on the possibility of crowd funding failing in its attempt to empower ordinary citizens — in spite of its poten-

tial to challenge incumbent institutions. The risk here is not that it might fail but that it might achieve the precise opposite: crowd funding's dependency on strong ties in social relations may fall short on the effects of isolation bubbles — in practice echo chambers that are not political at all. The illusion that this isolation might be fruitful in building a better world (as many interviewees mentioned) is blurred by the internal cohesion it fosters: inside the bubble everybody agrees with each other, money circulates, enabling a plethora of projects and this gives the impression of success. However these bubbles are ineffective in changing their surroundings — and actually people from other bubbles might ignore other bubbles existence for good.

Beyond that it is inevitable to ponder on the power concentrated in the platforms themselves — even if this argument was quite rare during my fieldwork. As discussed here, it is not unthinkable to consider that platforms from time to time might diverge from their audience. This was the case with the white supremacists and neo-Nazis, as mentioned, but also with nudity and adult content in struggles between creators and Patreon, for example (Dellinger 2018). As they play a central role, not only from the point of view of controlling what is allowed online, and not only as a financial trust between enthusiasts and creators, platforms themselves become landmarks in the crowd funding scenario. People know what to expect from each platform, how much to trust their online payment methods, what kind of users and projects are expected there and so on. Even if technology is available (as mentioned there are open source alternatives out there) the sort of trust and popularity one or other platform achieves is crucial for the success of the pro-

jects, making it another barrier for diversity and confrontation.

Finally, crowd funding's optimistic claims seem to ignore its own bias, its own privileges, in favor of a promise that is impossible to keep track of. This might not be a problem *per se*, but it is relevant when the question asked is whether or not crowd funding is a new and revolutionary way to do politics in the twentieth-first century. With a discourse that fails to offer the audience a clear path to social impact, crowd funding might fall short as well with regard to social entrepreneurship: it has established its own values without dialoguing with the external world. Huge investments can go here and there (in social entrepreneurship and crowd funding) and outsiders will still lack precise measures of success or impact.

The first part of this chapter discussed the antipolitical aspects of crowd funding, whilst the last part took into account possible strategic uses of ignorance. One could argue whether the dark side of crowd funding (from this chapter) is more or less relevant than the bright side (previous chapter). However, both analytical standpoints are important in framing a critical analysis of the possibility of crowd funding as politics. In fact, this tension might be relevant for other online mediums and might be interesting for sociology and political theory of the web as a whole: usually such phenomena as such are not good or bad, right or wrong, since they usually carry a share of incongruence and tensions, and shedding light on these topics is the role of social science.

8. Conclusions and discussion

Antipolitical individualism celebrates unrestricted subjectivity, antipolitical tribalism unrestricted collectivity (or on a sub communal level). Both versions of anti-authoritarian revolt follow the same anarchical impulse: anything goes (Schedler 1997:9).

As this research has discussed, crowd funding is not merely a technological platform. The way in which people engage with it is to establish a two-way relationship with the social surroundings: people come to these platforms with certain values and expectations and, in turn, those values and expectations are created and transformed in the community organized around the crowd funding campaigns. This is true about many phenomena that have been created in the digital culture, as also discussed in this thesis. Beyond that the point was to inquire about the nature of politics empowered and transformed by the emergence of crowd funding.

If I consider the extremes of a utopian and a dystopian perspective on that specific nature, the brightest possibility would be to understand that the politics put forward by these communities can be about empowering action to create the anew — and, in most cases, the anew not allowed within the incumbent institutions. Therefore, crowd funding might be opening more possibilities for ordinary people to act in a public space, what could be read as a form of (re)engagement in politics and as a way to (re)balance the strengths in modern states' political arena. That would sound promising in a world diagnosed by many scholars as antipolitical, or even in societies in which new generations are

labeled as disinterested in politics.

Extending this hypothetical scenario, crowd funding would fight individualistic branches of antipolitics in as far as every idea, project or proposal would still be dependent on a plurality in order to become action — even if this plurality can be considerably smaller than the majority usually required by formal democracies. It would also be possible to argue that this new configuration for politics might favor plurality better than current political mechanisms that are arguably set to stand for plurality, such as consensus or deliberation. Empowering numerous smaller groups might even sound more plural than processes in which only one idea is allowed to survive after a majority election, for example. The intrinsic need of financial and community support to execute projects through crowd funding would create a kind of gatekeeper for individual morals and judgements, and, at the same time, create free and open spaces for the most different sorts of ideas and initiatives.

However, there is also the opposite possibility; an hypothetical scenario in which the nature of politics as put forward by crowd funding is dark and degrading. First of all, it is a mechanism that dismisses the idea of political voice as a human right: this kind of voice would be a privilege of those who can spare some money to pledge on campaigns. In other words, it would consolidate many of the social and economic inequalities as *de facto* political advantages and disadvantages. Second, constructive debating and contrasting opposing ideas would become unnecessary as competing ideas would not compete among them if they are able to gather enough supporters — many ideas would become re-

al without scrutiny or consensus. And in the process of gathering people to pledge in one or other project, it would probably be the case that the social network range and charisma would be consolidated as an official and crucial asset of political power.

Finally, in this dystopian future of crowd funding politics, the public realm as a space to face the confronting idea, the different, the other, would probably disappear. This emphasis on pluralism would make room for a multitude of tiny realms, with each one of them ignoring the existence of the others. Maybe this might look like a conglomerate of independent little tribes - a world in which empathy for the others, for people from different tribes, would be unimaginable: there would be no social ties between these tribes (and humanity as a whole) and there would probably be a thin red line between a Hobbesian tribalism (between each group) and a hippie mindset (within each group).

Surely those extremes are not what we can find today. The nuances of the crowd funding community, together with the complexity of the modern state and its private and public realms, make the analysis much richer than that. However, these scenarios might work as typologies useful for understanding critiques put forward by the phenomenon of crowd funding, the possibilities opened by it, its limits, and also what is left behind when one look at crowd funding as a form of political action.

Chapter 6, *A New Realm to Empower Action*, described what could be seen as the bright side of this form of politics. In sum, the crowd funding community has a coherent set of critiques towards incumbent institutions, critiques that cannot be completely dismissed: they are aligned with different analysis and criticism from different scholars

and different schools of political theory, sociology and anthropology, as discussed in this thesis. This alignment is an argument to dismiss the possibility of taking this discourse, focused on challenging incumbent institutions, as mere rants from the young generation. In opposition, this political position helps in an overarching framework to address the dissatisfaction with the way power is handled in most modern democracies nowadays. In addition the empowerment enabled by crowd funding is indeed capable of impacting on the public realm somehow: maybe by funding public goods, maybe as a way to fund-raise for political causes not usually supported by other means, maybe by becoming an alternative career path for others. This last case might be seen as something belonging to the private sphere, however, the point is not the personal choice of one or another individual regarding their own careers, but the very political act of saying and demonstrating in public that there are more options out there than the traditional career path and life goals put forward by governments and corporations.

In contrast, the last chapter, *Isolation, Silence and Absence*, described how this reading of the political aspect of crowd funding has its own bias: it is impossible to dismiss the fact that many of my informants seem to favor the utopian typology of crowd funding; I understand they might not feel represented in their democracies, and they might not feel their personal values and goals are respected in careers in more traditional companies. I also can relate to the critiques they raise calling in to question the lack of freedom from social, political and economic inequalities. However, I do understand that what I have heard are their personal accounts, and I must take things in perspective to address the

subjectivities: the dark ones emerging from all these dissatisfactions, but also the bright ones that might emerge in the cases where they can find some comfort. As crowd funding might be at the core of the spaces in which they find some comfort, it is expected they favor the utopia over the dystopia.

In spite of that, the sociological analysis from that chapter has shed light on strategies my informants refer to, either in conscious or unconscious ways. These strategies are clear signposts of the antipolitical aspect embedded in the nature of the politics of crowd funding. Yet, these rapports refer to people who have succeeded in crowd funding, who are happy and engaged in the community. In addition, these strategies corroborate what I claimed in the paragraph above: a systematic and comprehensive overvaluation of crowd funding as the mechanism that opened many doors for my informants, and, at the same time, a systematic act of ignoring other social aspects that would not contribute to the consolidation of their comfort zone through crowd funding.

Another crucial aspect of crowd funding is the platforms themselves. As discussed earlier, instead of a neutral support for this mechanism, they become a powerful player in politics if there is a possibility of politics within crowd funding. My informants seem to overlook this potential problem as most of the time they feel aligned and represented by the curatorial layer imposed by these platforms. However, in an Arendtian sense, the freedom to act politically, the freedom to create the anew cannot depend on the behavior and directions of private platforms as crowd funding companies. Beyond that, the mechanism at stake is quite dependent on social networks — another layer of control

directly influenced by the private sphere. In both cases, crowd funding platforms and social network platforms, the corporate policies and algorithms have a direct impact on the supposed neutrality of the utopia if there are projects out there and anyone can pledge on them:

On many platforms, including Facebook, algorithmic manipulations are performed routinely; they range from purposes as mundane as deciding the color of a button, to decisions as significant as which news article is shown to the public. These decisions are increasingly central to social, political, and civic processes; consequently, the algorithmic harms that may arise from such computational form a brand new category, including a spectrum of issues from libel to violence (Tufekci 2015:205).

Although this concern was not so clear in the voice of my informants, this might also be justified by their success and alignment within the crowd funding community, whilst this does not suffice to completely dismiss the argument raised by the platform capitalism critique. If Arendt argued that citizens must be free and empowered to participate in the public realm, it is problematic to consider that a privately owned set of platforms are the basis for this participation. This debate is crucial and it is not about how evil or how benevolent a corporation can be. Instead, this is a matter of paramount importance to rethink the public and private spheres, agency and the future of our society as a whole:

Computational agency is expanding into more and more spheres [...] They are armed with our data, and can even divine private information that we have not disclosed. They are interactive, act with agency in the world, and are often answerable only to the major corporations that own them. As the internet of things and connected, "smart" devices become more widespread, the data available to them,

and their opportunities to act in the world will only increase. And as more and more corporations deploy them in many processes from healthcare to hiring, their relevance and legal, political and policy importance will also rise. This is a novel challenge, with little to draw from human history as either a metaphor or an analogy (Tufekci 2015:217).

Surely a more complete analysis on the topic should include more critiques of crowd funding, people who have had mostly bad experiences or even people who would decline to take part in these platforms altogether. If the most common example of the success of crowd funding is the musician next door who can now have their album recorded, a state of the art crowd funding should take into account the voice of incumbent representatives of the major players in the recording industry, or people criticizing the fact that the musician next door should get his album recorded, what Keen (2007) calls the *cult of amateur*. Those voices are valuable, but out of the scope of this research.

This research has offered an in-depth and nuanced description of people highly engaged in crowd funding, in different countries and in different platforms. The findings resonates with a diverse literature discussing the boundaries of modern democracies. In that sense, crowd funding might be another case study in social science schools arguing that representativeness is a weak characteristic of most political spaces nowadays, in the ones articulating complex relations between the public and the private, and also in the field of politics and digital culture.

Specifically in these studies of the internet and society, the case built here on crowd funding reinforces arguments such as the power of micro donations of time, and

of the re-shaping of (political) leadership in the digital world (Margetts *et al* 2013). It also corroborates the critiques of the limits and boundaries that usually come altogether in these studies, and correlated areas such as platform capitalism (Tufekci 2014, 2015 and 2016). Yet, in a broader sense, the study of crowd funding and society showed itself relevant in discussions about the social life of money (Graeber 2011, Dodd 2014) and the social aspects of jobs and careers (Potter 2015).

Underlying the choice to study a series of particular cases and life trajectories, using very qualitative methodologies, was the potential to understand the broader and complex social environment we live in from these small scale case studies. Crowd funding, the digital version of passing the hat, was a powerful entry point to discuss overarching topics such as world views, personal values and aspirations and, as a consequence, political theory and modern states.

That said, some readers might ask what to expect from crowd funding. Being normative or prescriptive is not the task of this descriptive sociological inquiry. However, some important points can be reinforced in these last few lines. The first of all is the problematic — or even nonexistent — public realm in modern societies. To put it differently, the over-privatization of every realm of social life has pushed people to forge alternatives in which they can do something that is not career- or profit-driven in the more traditional sense. Crowd funding is a way through which my interviewees find some relief, a place in the margins (as Felipe said) in which they can risk (and fund) the anew. Second, this perception calls into question scholars that defend that people are alienated from politics.

In fact, the very same people might be seen as desperate citizens trying to find a way to be political — and precisely because incumbent political institutions seem too corrupted by private interests, they have to pave their own way to try to be political. Finally, the (self) perception that crowd funding is indeed working in the political sense for some people is not enough: the political is not merely about freedom of expression and waving your own banners. Politics is about dealing with differences — and there are several ways to do that: balancing powers and imposing constraints, trying to address conflicts with debates and so on. Crowd funding might mimic one or another trace of this ideal public space, but it fails in several others. On the one hand it is an alternative to empower some non-hegemonic world views, to support minorities, and to try to empower projects that are out of the radars of incumbent institutions. This is very political indeed. However, on the other hand, crowd funding is also undeniably and intrinsically linked to the private realm: it has minimum (if any) social control on imposing its own boundaries, and it is not universally accessible as money is its ballot — one of more iconic symbols of worldwide inequalities. On top of that, crowd funding is usually built upon centralizing platforms that converge in themselves a series of powers in terms of curatorial, financial and strategic positioning. These tensions coexist in crowd funding — as well as in many other instances of the problematic public space most modern democracies have today.

On top of that, this research was based on a very specific public in terms of class. As mentioned in chapter 4, *Re-signifying Money*, in spite of their origins from all around the globe most of my interviewees represent a very specific cutout in terms of so-

cial and economic class. Therefore their opinions and, consequentially, the tone of this thesis are representative of a particular public: high level of digital fluency, well-educated and well-off in terms of making a living — to mention a few characteristics relevant for the understanding of the context surrounding the arguments sustained here. The point is that even when discussing digital culture and the internet as a whole, this might not be a typical profile. I based this research on a culture of internet heavy users, graduated, relatively privileged in the economic sense and, finally, with some degree of entrepreneurship in their veins (a risky endeavor propelled, at least in part, by a safety net assured by their social and economic position of privilege).

Hence this research also highlighted what crowd funding can tell us about the tensions present in the overarching society we live in. In other words, the possibility of political action discussed so far can stretch, at maximum, to a very specific group (and minority), represented by the point of view of my atypical and privileged interviewees. In spite of that, most of these tensions resonates the literature about the modern state, democracy and antipolitical concepts in the last few decades. This research focused on crowd funding reinforced many of the critiques held by these scholars, linking this theories and arguments to the debates held by STS (Science and Technology Studies). The utopian view on the openness of the internet is present in the free way people connect to each other to support projects and causes in the platform capitalism. Also, this thesis brought in the will to be political and to be social in both these contexts: the open internet and the turbulent political institutions from the twentieth century. Yet the fact that my

informants seem to have restrictions on incumbent institutions such as governments and corporations shows that these institutions are failing in making a world in which people are free to act according to their will, reinforcing the challenges we face in terms of contemporary political institutions and in terms of contemporary political theory.

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Notes

1. Brazilian Real is the official Brazilian currency, usually called Real (singular) or Reais (plural).
2. All translations of non-English quotations are my own, unless indicated otherwise.
3. The "largest" is read over the news without an objective measure or comparison with other platforms (e.g. Canadian Press, 2013). In spite of that I could not find a platform annual report with more users, pledges collected or projects than Kickstarter among the main players in the market.
4. See New York Times 2013, Romero and Neuman 2013, and Romero 2013, respectively.
5. See chapter 5, *Autonomy*.
6. This approach is also based in what Hutchby (2001) called *affordances*.
7. It is considered a resurgence since the first use of the term *prosumer*, in the 1980s, was proposed by a futurologist (Toffler 1980), and only a couple of decades later the idea could be embraced as a rooted academic perspective.
8. That is, for example, a risk in referring to qualitative research and a grounded theory approach, as put by Blakie (2010). In spite of that, it is worth highlighting that the author does not discourage the employment of this methodological approaches.
9. This figure is from 2015. In May 2014 this same Wikipedia article mentioned only 60 crowd funding platforms. This is a 60% increase in platform numbers in 12 months.
10. Catarse (2015a) operates under MIT License.
11. In terms of the kind of projects hosted by these platforms, all of them vary widely. Even if they were created with some kind of public or projects in mind (for example, Indiegogo and Kickstarter primary focus was on creative projects, while Patreon and Catarse focuses are on artistic and cultural projects), they are open enough to host projects that vary considerably: from movies and music, to software and hardware technology development, including sports, civic actions, political organization, and education. Hence the directions publicly announced might be internal guidelines and not something clearly perceived by the general public.
12. Regarding Kickstarter, it could be added that they eventually get involved in judicial cases around patents for their 'all-or-nothing' model (Purewal 2011).

13. Arendt does not justify the use of the German term *Volkswirtschaft* in this passage. Arguably it has no direct translation into English. Nonetheless it refers to a kind of economics driven by the nation's needs, the needs expressed by its households as well as by the private and public sectors; in some languages, as in Dutch or Latin for example, its translation is similar to *national economy* (*algemene economie* and *oeconomia nationalis* respectively).

14. Interestingly Sennett (1980:44) also argues that this economic behavior compromised not only ordinary people's agency, but the core freedom they were supposed to inherit from such a society: "The market ideology promised the consummation of individual freedom of action. The market in practice was anti-individualistic. It displaced masses of peasants from their land, whatever their own desires to remain. At the moments when the supply of labor in cities exceeded the demand for labor, there was in fact no labor market. If an employee did not like wages an employer paid, he (*sic*) could go starve; there were plenty of others to take his place [...] The market system of the last century, rather, made the concepts of community and individual ambivalent, and ambivalent in a peculiar way. No specific human being, no human agent, could be held accountable for disturbances in these realms."

15. At this point it is worth highlighting that the sociology of consumption has a strong, coherent and incisive argument in favor of categorizing consumption as political agency (for example, Micheletti 2003). In spite of that, these scholars are not arguing that this political side of consumption is better, worse or that it should replace in any sense the more traditional forms of political agency. It sounds hard to believe that political consumption *alone* would afford to grant ordinary people participation in the decision-making process within the public or social realm.

16. As Tufekci (2016:73) explains, "network effects, also called network externalities, are the tendency of the value of some products or services to increase as more people use them, and to become less worthwhile when they are not used by others, even if the less popular product or service is objectively better, cheaper, faster, or more diverse in its offerings. For many online applications, everyone wants to be where everyone else is."

17. To be clear, Daniel does not seem to dislike the American or the German community. He is active in both, participating in online and in-person board game groups. In this part of the interview he was just describing that he sees a difference in the way the communities are organizing themselves and responding to externalities. He seemed enthusiastic about the way Americans could find a way outside the established market, but, at the same time, satisfied to see that Germans have the possibility to launch their own games through the local companies.

18. As we will see later, for Arendt (1998) this difference is crucial because it puts these choices out of the sphere of labor, and shifts it to the two other possibilities: work and/or

action.

19. Counting on savings among young people was much more common in Brazil than in the US or the UK. A hypothesis (not explored here, but popular in the media; see Pramuk 2015 for example) is that the expensive tuition fees in the US and UK could limit the possibility of young people taking risks: as soon as they graduate, they have to start working to pay their education loans. In Brazil most of the top universities are public and free, and even the private ones have mostly affordable tuition fees and funding options that alleviate the restrictive aspects of it.

20. Those wages are considered high in most Brazilian cities according to Felipe. In the country the minimum wage is less than 3 thousand dollars per year.

21. Weber employed the expression *historical reality* in the very beginning of the *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in order to describe his methodological approach: "Such an historical concept [the spirit of capitalism] [...] cannot be defined according to the formula *genus proximum, differentia specifica*, but it must be gradually put together out of the individual parts which are taken from historical reality to make it up" (Weber 1976:13).

22. Petrobras is actually a major Brazilian company. It has been listed in Forbes 500 for 22 years, figuring in the 58th position in the 2016 ranking.

23. Box 1824, mentioned by Carla as "Box," is a Brazilian consultancy that has built a great reputation publishing researches on Brazilian culture — most of them on Creative Commons licenses, free to read and watch on the internet. Those reports usually are shaped in short videos that easily become viral on the internet. As a disclaimer I must add that Carla told me she has freelanced for this consultancy.

24. According to the OECD Factbook (2013) between 2002 and 2010 self-employment raised from 12.7% to 13.8% and the long-term unemployment rate raised from 21.7% to 33.4%. Stephen's interview was in 2014.

25. In Brazil there are regulations based on UN's International Standard Industrial Classification, very similar to regulations in many other countries, as my interviewees reported. For them this means that when setting up an organization one must restrict the kind of projects one is going to execute. As some aforementioned examples, many of my interviewees have a very heterodox professional path, and they would like to act as technology consultants and in parallel they would be teaching tango, composing and playing music.

26. See chapter 3, *Literature review*.

27. Dragons' Den is a reality TV show in which participants try to pitch their ideas to a board of venture capitalists to get investments.

28. Jaffe (1997) is referring to Schedler (1997) in this quote.
29. In fact, there are reports of "heated arguments" in the Ancient Greek (Fine 1983).
30. Surely there were more tangible rewards: official team clothing, spare parts of the real Formula 1 car and a dinner with the drivers — depending on the amount pledged. However Victor has not brought attention to these rewards during the interview, therefore his focus was totally on the feeling of the fans instead of the official rewards.
31. See chapter 5, *Autonomy*.
32. "The hero, the 'doer of great deeds and speaker of great words,' as Achilles was called, needed the poet — not the prophet, but the seer — whose divine gift sees in the past what is worth telling in the present and the future. This pre-polis past of Greece is the source of the Greek political vocabulary that still survives in all European languages" (Arendt 2005:45).
33. Their analysis focused on metrics such as non-immediacy (verbs in the first person), expressivity (ratio of adjectives and adverbs to nouns and verbs) and informality (ratio of misspelled words). They conclude "expressiveness of the language of scammers is low, due to over-control and less conviction about what is being said" (Shafqat *et al* 2016:99).
34. To be clear I am not saying that Arendt is referring nor subscribing to complexity theory. Also I am not claiming she is a precursor of this field. The point is that, as Arendt (2005:58) put it, "men (*sic*) do not know what they are doing with respect to others, that they may intend good and achieve evil, and vice versa, and that nevertheless they aspire in action to the same fulfillment of intention that is the sign of mastership in their intercourse with natural, material things, has been the one great topic of tragedy since Greek antiquity." To a certain extent this acknowledgement is also found in complexity theory in which systems are non-linear, non-teleological, and their outcomes are highly unpredictable (Mitleton-Kelly 2003).
35. In terms of social network analysis Desmond (2012) also suggests the category of disposable ties, which facilitates the flow of resources and, sporadically, can become weak ties themselves. This does not seem to be the case within the crowd funding community. As he argued (2012:1328): "Are disposable ties simply a variant of weak ties? They are not, for a number of reasons. First, disposable ties usually are characterized by high levels of emotional intensity and reciprocity of goods and services. [...] Second, while weak ties often act as "bridges" that connect one set of people to another, disposable ties rarely do so. [...] Finally, there is the matter of disposability". What I observed from my informants is that an intense emotional relationship is hardly ever the case. Reciprocity might be present, but definitively is not mandatory. And, most important, the kind of ties crowd funding communities depends on are the kinds that allows new connections (even if within a niche community).

36. Figures regarding population with internet access according to ICT (2017) and the one about online payments according to Pew Research Center (2016).

37. Nesta stands for National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts. It is a British innovation foundation that started with a £250 million endowment from the UK National Lottery. They were funders of the crowd funding platform Emily worked for.

38. In this passage, McGoey is citing Elkington and Hartigan (2008), "two well regarded proponents of the concept [of social entrepreneurship]" as McGoey (2015:66) introduces them.